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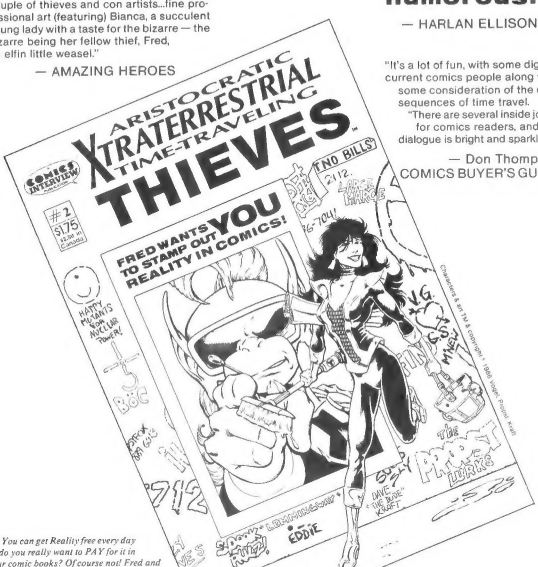

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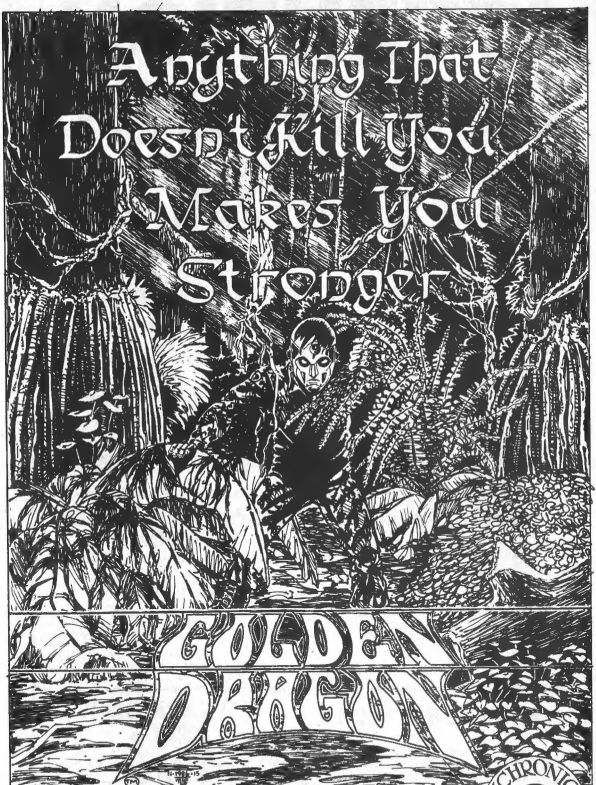

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long in the tooth

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UP FRONT

COMICS INTERVIEW is closing in on issue #50 — before you know it, we'll be beginning our *fifth* year of publication! — and yet success sometimes seems self-defeating.

Sure, we're well established and well respected, a credible voice in the comics industry. The magazine even sells well — and there's the problem. I have been told many times by retailers, "We're happy with COMICS INTERVIEW — it's perfect, it sells out!" So eager are they not to be stuck with a single unsold copy that they fail to consider what it could be *costing* them. Who knows how many sales were lost by not increasing their order a few more copies, to provide for those readers who came in looking for the latest issue *after* all copies had been sold?

Given the nature of direct sales distribution, in which a retailer has to guess how many copies of a publication to buy and *pay* for them, whether or not they sell, it's easy to understand caution and conservatism.

But the absurdity of the aforementioned attitude becomes apparent when applied to, say, DARK KNIGHT. If a shop ordered five copies and sold them, it might well be "perfect" — but what about the next hundred customers who *would* have bought a copy, if it had only been available? Think I'm exaggerating? Why do you suppose COMICS INTERVIEW #31, our Dark Knight issue, is in such scarce supply that it's selling for many times cover price — if you can find it!

A double penalty is being paid for all those unsold, overstocked first issues of *bad* comics, black-and-white or otherwise: the actual money tied up in worthless material no one wants — as well as the profits lost by not stocking sufficient quantities of established publications with proven sales records, such as COMICS INTERVIEW.

Think about it.

David

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"So each of us pitched in a certain amount;

Elite Comics sprang from the dreams of a Midland, Texas, surveyor named Carl Knappe and an oil field mechanic named Tom Floyd, both "tired of working for the man" and looking for a little self-expression in their lives. Their opening shot, THE EPSILON WAVE, was a super-hero title with occult overtones that featured stories filled to overflowing with incidents both unexpected and, at times, inexplicable. Intriguing as it often was, though, the first few issues suffered from a staggering series of technical problems, and the burden of disappointing sales was added to that of the creators' dissatisfaction with their own work. Such a mixture of harsh realities and deflated egos has sent many a would-be creator packing — but men pursuing "the stuff dreams are made of" don't give up so easily.

Tentative steps toward enhancing the creative end had already been made by hiring Dennis Yee for the spin-off title, SEADRAGON, and by contracting Elite's first creator-owned book, THE TWILIGHT AVENGER. With the hiring of writer-reviewer R.A. Jones as Executive Editor of the line, the expansion began in earnest.

I confronted the newly-assembled "E-Team," as Jones calls them, at the 1986 Dallas Fantasy Fair. At that time, much of the work we'd been discussing had yet to see print, and I had little idea of what to expect. From previous acquaintance I was prepared for R.A.'s ebullience, Terry Tidwell's shyness, John Wooley's witty practicality — but I wasn't prepared for the sheer diversity of types alternately lounging or sitting at attention around the Elite suite: wry and intelligent Dennis Yee, kinetic Butch Burcham, precise and thoughtful Steve Erwin . . . a collection of true individuals, to be sure, yet men who shared more than just a common masthead.

Glimpsed at that heady moment when anything is still possible, the dream was there, too, in each of them, and when our hour was up I left hoping that each of them would make it.

The shop talk that follows, then, is at once a picture of a company in transition, and an introduction to the men making it happen. For those of you with a similar dream, let it also be an example: you can reach the end of the rainbow, but sometimes it's one hell of a hike . . .

JAMES VANCE: *To start at the top — Carl Knappe, you're the president of Elite Comics. How did you get started in this business?*

CARL KNAPPE: Tom Floyd was at my house one day when I came home from work, and he said, "Have I got a deal for you — how would you like to produce comic books?" Not having even read a comic book for twelve to fifteen years, I wanted to look into the subject a little more before I put my name on the dotted line. So we went to the banks to try to sell them on the idea. One said no, one said they'd have to talk to the board of directors, and the third said, sure. You can probably guess which one we went with. So we filed and became a corporation, each of us pitched in a certain amount ourselves to get started, and off we went.

JAMES: *How long ago was that?*

CARL: February of 1985.

JAMES: *So you weren't exactly a long-time fan, though I gather that Tom was . . .*

TOM FLOYD: Yeah, I've been a comics fan ever since I could read, ever since **Jack Kirby** recreated Captain America back in AVENGERS #4. The gut feeling I got from **Kirby**'s work just sucked me into the comics field, totally. I always thought, ever since I was a kid, that this was what I really wanted to do, to produce good quality comics.

JAMES: *How easy was it to get a comic book published in Texas?*

CARL: Very hard. We had lots of trouble. One, with the distributors, just getting them to look at our product. That was

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tom Floyd
Occupation: Vice President, Elite Comics; writer, inker
Born: 28 June 1951
Residence: Odessa, TX
Education: Degree in Commercial Art, North Texas State University.
Credits: Co-creator, penciller, inker, writer, THE EPSILON WAVE.
Favorite Comics: DARK KNIGHT, THE WATCHMEN, JON SABLE, VIGILANTE, DETECTIVE, BATMAN.
Favorite Comics Character: Captain America, from the Golden Age to the present.
Pet Peeve: Rip-off/parody four-named animal comics.

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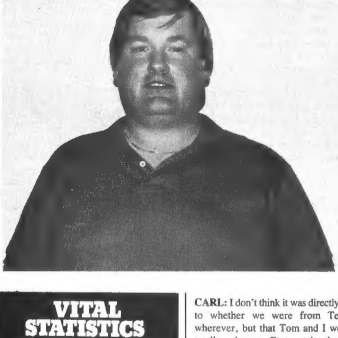
we filed and became a corporation."

COMICS



VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Carl Knappe
Occupation:President, Elite Comics
Born: 6 March 1954
Residence: Midland, TX
Education: Degree in Business, Midland College.
Credits: Co-creator and original writer, SEADRAGON.
Favorite Books: LORD OF THE RINGS.
Favorite Authors: John Steinbeck, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
Favorite Movies: John Wayne movies, the STAR WARS films, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK.
Favorite Comics: GREEN LANTERN, THOR, JUDGE DREDD, DARK KNIGHT, and the Elite line.

the hardest.

JAMES: *Was that because you were an unknown company, or because you were based in a nontraditional place like Texas?*

CARL: I don't think it was directly related to whether we were from Texas or wherever, but that Tom and I were just totally unknown. Fortunately, there were three distributors who decided to take a chance on us, and that got us going.

JAMES: *A lot of the independent companies, when they're starting out, produce at least a first issue in black and white before they make the jump to color — if they ever do at all — but you went with color from the start.*

TOM: The distributors suggested that a black-and-white book probably wouldn't do very well — some of the smaller distributors, especially, look real long and hard at black-and-white books — so one of the concessions we made was to go to color. THE EPSILON WAVE had actually begun as a black and white, and we switched to color prior to that first issue.

JAMES: *Is it easy to get your comic printed? There aren't any other color comics coming from Texas that I know of. . .*

CARL: It's not like in the East. It was very hard finding a printer, and the people to do the color separations.

JAMES: *You've had some problems with color, haven't you?*

CARL: On our first four books, we couldn't get the color blue. Characters were crying purple tears, and reds were coming out brown. We changed the color keys, but the colors still came out the same. Well, we finally found out that our printer wasn't using process red, he was using a cherry red that in effect filtered all the blue right off the page. He's a commercial printer, and most of his clients liked the cherry red better, so he didn't think it was necessary to use anything else for us. We got him to switch to process red as of the July '86 books. We finally got our blue, but for some reason, now all the colors were too thick. *(Laughter.)* We're on the right track now, though, and our next few books ought to look a lot better.

JAMES: *The first few issues of THE EPSILON WAVE were released as Independent Comics, and then with #5, you became Elite Comics. Why the name change?*

CARL: We received a letter from another company that stated that they had had the name Independent for several years, and one of the distributors had sent our ripped covers to them. They felt like there was some confusion between the two companies, and since they did have first grabs on Independent, we decided to go with another name. So we're Elite now.

JAMES: *Did that cause more confusion, then, with distributors or readers?*

CARL: I actually think that the other company did us a favor. I think everyone involved here likes Elite Comics better than Independent Comics. I do.

TOM: Also, at the same time the name change became official, our two new books, SEADRAGON #1 and THE TWILIGHT AVENGER #1, were in production. I think it gave us a revival in fan interest. Rather than Independent having one book coming out every now and then, Elite now has three books in regular production. That's got to give you a little more ground to stand on, as a company.

JAMES: *Tom, you're listed in THE EPSILON WAVE #1 as co-creator, with Carl, and writer of the series. How much did each of you actually contribute to creating the comic?*

TOM: Carl is the creator of the SEADRAGON strip. I'd previously submitted a tryout story to the DC Talent Search, and that was where the EPSILON WAVE character Nightmare came from. We didn't want just one 32-page story for the first issue, so we decided to break it up with a backup feature that we could split off from the book. We were always looking towards the future.

JAMES: *EPSILON WAVE, especially for*

"...quite frankly, the books that Elite

Seadragon, by Dennis Yee and Butch Burcham.

the first few issues, reads like a story you're wanted to tell for a long time...

TOM: Essentially, the basis for the EPSILON WAVE story was around for about two and a half years before it was published. The direction we took with the first issue was a little raw, but with the addition of **Mr. Jones** here, I think we can put it back on track.

JAMES: *"Mr. Jones" at this point has just come on as Executive Editor of Elite Comics, and the issues he's been working on have yet to hit the stands as we're talking. What do you see your duties to be with the company, and what are your plans?*

R.A. JONES: Well, I saw Elite as having two basic problems. One was simple lack of recognition. They weren't being covered in the fan press. There were many people then, and even now, who didn't know who Elite was or what they were publishing. The second, quite frankly, was the fact that the books they were publishing weren't very good. So I saw my immediate duties, because I also help out on the public relations end of things, as basically two functions: one, I had to do something to bring them and the product to the attention of the public, and two, in the editorial capacity to do whatever I could to make what was not good, better. Hopefully, the combination of the two would result in increased sales and a larger audience.

JAMES: *You haven't had much time for any hands-on work yet, have you?*

R.A.: Very little. I'm taking that in two phases, too. With the lead time you have in comic-book publishing, I knew it would be three or four months before anything I could contribute in terms of story content would show up. Three or four months can be fatal in the comic-book industry, so I decided I needed to try to do some things quickly that would at least retain the audience that Elite already had. The short-term fixes we're in the process of instituting now are things like redesigning the logos. **Paul Gulacy** and **Timothy Truman** have agreed to do covers for us, which is the sort of thing that will give us greater recognition in the fan press, and more legitimacy as a real comic-book

was publishing weren't very good."

company rather than simply one of the pack that's just publishing the first thing that comes to mind. I want to try to help Tom and Carl in any way I can to solve the printing problems that have given the books a muddy and somewhat amateurish look, improving the artwork in any way we can, to make the package look better. In the second phase, of course, we just try to make the stories better by working as closely as possible with the writers and the artists.

JAMES: *Still, despite the flaws you point out, the first few books did manage to attract some creators to the company. You have Steve Erwin, who's going to be doing EPSILON WAVE. And Dennis Yee, who, chronologically, came along before Steve. Dennis, you're doing SEADRAGON now. You've pencilled the first issue, and you're going to be writing too?*

DENNIS YEE: I have started writing with issue #3. There was a three-part story that was already planned when I came on, and the first two issues had been written by **Richard Paolinelli**. I finished up that third part, and I'm starting off now on my own tangent.

JAMES: *So how did you come to be working for Elite?*

DENNIS: Actually, I contacted Elite. I'd been browsing in the comic-book store and saw THE EPSILON WAVE. They had this announcement in there that they were looking for artists and writers, and I was looking for work, getting tired of my job as an insurance analyst — *(laughter)* — *extremely* tired of my job as an insurance analyst, and thought, here's the chance to

Any resemblance between R.A. and the slasher from EPSILON WAVE is purely intentional.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dennis Yee
Occupation: Writer, penciller
Born: 4 January 1955
Residence: Lafayette, CA
Education: Degree in Marine Biology, Masters Degree in Business Administration, University of Southern California.
Credits: Writer-penciller of "The Desperadoes," in NEW TALENT SHOWCASE #15 and 19; plot and layouts, ACTION COMICS #569; writer-penciller, ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY #1; writer-penciller, SEADRAGON.
Major Artistic Influences: Joe Kubert, Gil Kane, Jack Kirby, Bill Sienkiewicz.
Favorite Authors: Shakespeare, John Steinbeck, John Cheever, Stan Lee.

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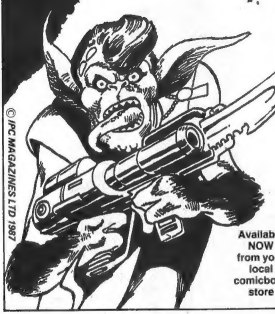

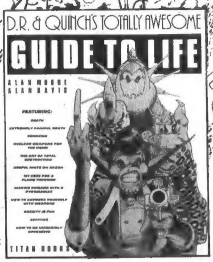

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JAMES: *You're one of the people who were discovered in the DC Talent Search, aren't you?*

DENNIS: The very first story I sold to DC was a Superman story that appeared in ACTION COMICS. **Julie Schwartz** bought that one, and he forwarded my name to the New Talent Coordinator, **Sal Amendola,** who became to a large extent my mentor. I owe him a lot. **Sal Amendola** helped me to become a professional. He was a tremendous teacher, and he has a lot of experience and a lot to offer to people who want to get into the industry. He and I saw pretty much eye-to-eye on what we thought comics should be. He was extremely supportive, and whatever stories I've had published by DC, he was the one responsible for it.

JAMES: *But despite being a DC discovery, you say you were looking for work. . .*

DENNIS: DC decided, for I think largely corporate reasons, that the Talent Search should be discontinued after two years. They cancelled TALENT SHOWCASE, which was the only place most of us could go, and turned it into ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY. I had a couple of stories in there, and a couple more are on inventory. They also started hiring a lot of British artists, and I think there was a change of policy that said, "If we can get established pros, whether they're from Britian or other companies, then let's do that." So there was a de-emphasis on the New Talent People, and more emphasis on people who had already proven their worth in the market. I have no problem with that. That's how you do business. From their point of view, it made perfect sense to me.

JAMES: *You were talking just now about "what comics should be." What are you trying to accomplish with your work?*

DENNIS: Good question. I don't think I can give a definition of what comics should be for everybody, but the stories *I* enjoy writing or reading have a decided emphasis on relationships between people. I want the stories to say something — about a particular problem, perhaps, or a particular relationship between people. For me, that's what comics should be about

JAMES: *So that's one change you're going to make in SEADRAGON?*

DENNIS: Yes I want to introduce a cast of characters. For me, that's where the real stories are. Super-hero comics generally have somebody saving the world

every two issues, and for me that's gotten a little old. That's been going on for the last forty years. For me, the stories that endure, and I'm talking about any kind of literature, are those that are about people.

JAMES: *You have a degree in Marine Biology — so you know what you're drawing in SEADRAGON?*

DENNIS: Yeah, I do make an effort to do the research. In fact, I had to look through my mom's closet for a lot of my old textbooks. *(Laughter.)* I try to put in algae and fish that are specific to the area that Seadragon is swimming in. Of course, that's partly the reason he's been in San Diego lately. I know that area and that marine fauna the best. He'll be in Northern California before long, because I studied there one summer. *(Laughter.)*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Wooley
Occupation: Writer
Born: 4 April 1949
Residence: Foyil, OK
Education: Degree in Biology, minors in Enzymology and Zoology, Oklahoma State University 1970. MA in English, Central State University 1977.
Credits: As far as comics, some stories for Warren's EERIE; "R.S.V.P." in THE FOOZLE #3; THE MIRACLE SQUAD. Also OLD FEARS, a novel with Ron Wolfe; editor of DAN TURNER.

JAMES: *Other than Dennis, it looks as though the rest of the contributors are from the Southwest. Is that a conscious decision or preference on the company's part?*

R.A.: No, this is where most of the talent is. *(Laughter.)* There *is* a great deal of talent in the Midwest, Southwest. This is not usually recognized, since they're not on the East or West Coast, but it is a fact, and I think it's just serendipity that we all happened to get our break at the same time with the same company.

JOHN WOOLEY: We ought to point out also that two of the books, THE TWILIGHT AVENGER and THE EPSILON WAVE, are set in the Southwest.

JAMES: *Well, speaking of THE TWILIGHT AVENGER — the first issue has just come out, and seems to be doing very well.*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Terry Tidwell
Occupation: Artist
Born: 26 June 1954
Residence: Claremore, OK
Education:Degree in Civil Engineering, University of Oklahoma 1976
Credits: "R.S.V.P." in THE FOOZLE #3; "Man-Frog" series in MEDIA SIGHT; Vision and Conan inventory stories for Marvel; editorial cartoons for various Oklahoma newspapers; THE MIRACLE SQUAD for Fantagraphics' Upshot Graphics.

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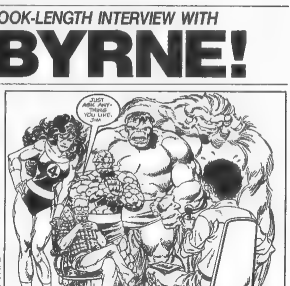

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"...or go over the edge and commit suicide."

CARL: We've already had re-orders on it. Each time we put out a new title, it sells better than the one before, but I think TWILIGHT AVENGER'S going to be our first sell-out. We haven't even shipped yet, and it's already sold almost twice as many copies as total sales on EPSILON WAVE #1. If it stays this successful, we want to go monthly with it starting in January '87.

JAMES: *John, from what you've told me, the storyline is pretty self-contained. If you become an ongoing series, will your character be able to find other reasons to get back into costume?*

JOHN: Yes, if we're selling books, he sure will. *(Laughter.)* And I predict that about the time the book stops selling, he'll just plain lose interest in crime fighting.

JAMES: *Since the book just came out today, I haven't had a chance to read it yet. I know that it's a period piece...*

JOHN: Yeah, and "Twilight Avenger" is a real period name. We're working with a lot of the archetypes of the Thirties — the beautiful, wisecracking female reporter... the hooded menace... the Avenger's equipment, the latest in 1930s "scientific weaponry"... we want people to get the feeling of a movie serial of the Thirties, or a comic book of the Forties, or a pulp magazine, specifically. I'm a great reader of the pulps, a big fan. We're going after that flavor of "guns, girls and gangsters" that they had in the Thirties and Forties.

JAMES: *Dennis was talking about the research he had to do, Terry. You must be up to your ears in it, yourself?*

TERRY TIDWELL: I spend a lot of time in the library. I've dredged up 1930s Sears catalogs, and I'm looking through POPULAR MECHANICS from that era, because they always highlighted the scientific advances of the period.

JOHN: I work for THE TULSA WORLD as an entertainment writer, and we've also been doing research in the morgue there, but newspaper accounts tend to be pretty cut and dried. In terms of that 1936-37 milieu, which is when THE TWILIGHT AVENGER takes place, what I'm interested in is getting the cadence of the speech and the slang expressions of the Thirties. I get a lot from the pulp writers themselves, the hard-boiled writers especially. With period stuff like this, you want that kind of detail to seem real. It probably won't be, exactly, but you want it to *seem* real.

JAMES: *Just leafing through the book, I notice that the art has the feel of a Golden Age job, but it's still in a modern style...*

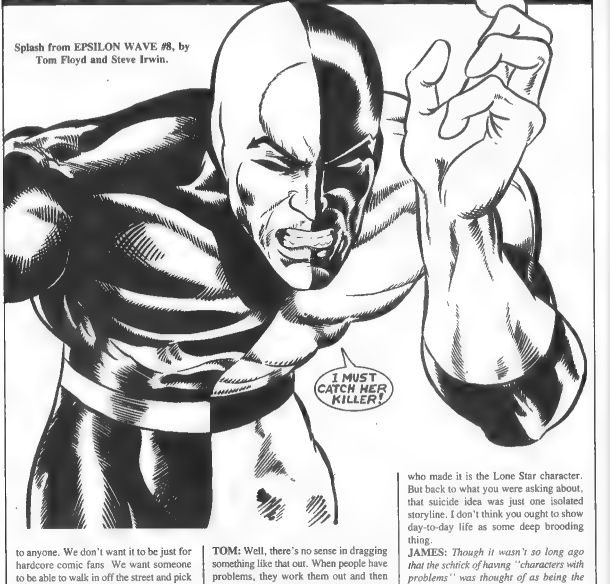
TERRY: I've looked through a lot of John's old comics. They *used* a simpler style then. Storytelling was simpler, they didn't use a lot of detail on the backgrounds. So that's how we approached it.

JOHN: We want the book to be accessible

The Twilight Avenger, by Terry Tidwell and Butch Burcham.

© 1986 Tidwell & Burcham

"...there are no women with wings



Splash from EPSILON WAVE #3, by Tom Floyd and Steve Irwin.

to anyone. We don't want it to be just for hardcore comic fans. We want someone to be able to walk in off the street and pick up the book and enjoy it. If anything, we want to be able to expand the market, not narrow it. Tom and I were talking about this at lunch today, and I think that's pretty much the idea the guys have with the whole Elite line.

JAMES: *TWILIGHT AVENGER's the most obvious example of that, but EPSILON WAVE and SEADRAGON are fairly accessible stuff, too. The characters don't seem to do a lot of agonizing over their problems, for instance. Seadragon's unhappy because he's trapped in an ugly suit, but...*

DENNIS: That's changing.

JAMES: *Oh, it is?*

DENNIS: He'll still be trapped in it, but it won't be ugly. *(Laughter.)* It might come up one panel every two stories.

TOM: Well, there's no sense in dragging something like that out. When people have problems, they work them out and then go on about their business. If you have a character that seems to be moaning all the time about his situation, realistically, he's either going to have to totally change his life, or go over the edge and commit suicide.

JAMES: *Didn't you announce a series at one time about a character who ends up doing just that? Obviously, it would have been a limited series...*

TOM: *(Laughter.) Very* limited.

CARL: We bounced that idea around, but it's been put on the back burner for now.

TOM: That was a pet project of mine, but the time just wasn't right for that kind of story right now. The characters themselves ended up in EPSILON WAVE. There was going to be one character who killed himself and one who survived, and the one who made it is the Lone Star character. But back to what you were asking about, that suicide idea was just one isolated storyline. I don't think you ought to show day-to-day life as some deep brooding thing.

JAMES: *Though it wasn't so long ago that the schtick of having "characters with problems" was thought of as being the new realism in comics.*

R.A.: That's because until then, so many of the 50s and 60s comic-book characters were one-dimensional. What **Stan Lee** did was to come along and make them two-dimensional. *(Laughter.)* Compared to what we'd had before, there *was* more reality in characters who brooded and felt sorry for themselves.

STEVE ERWIN: But I think that went too far toward one end of the scale.

R.A.: Oh, sure. Marvel made it so popular that everyone jumped on the bandwagon.

STEVE: I think that realism is people *having* problems. What was at the wrong end of the scale was people sitting around and moaning about their problems all the time.

R.A.: I think more and more writers are

flying over Dallas at the moment."

looking for that third dimension, now.

TOM: Yeah, like Steve says, that kind of got out of hand, and we want to try to bring it back into perspective.

JAMES: *Steve, you've signed on as penciller for EPSILON WAVE. What do you hope to bring to the title?*

STEVE: A little more sense of realism, I suppose. A little bit of fun...

JAMES: *Well, you'll have some pretty fanciful characters to bring realism to...*

STEVE: My approach to "realism" is bring them down to earth in a real setting. These characters are the only ones I know of that operate in Dallas and Fort Worth, where I live. The first issue I did, I actually drove out on the highway to see what it looked like out there for a particular panel. I'm looking to draw things so that people in the area will recognize them — and I think that if they're drawn well and correctly, then people who have never been in the area will see them as real landmarks, too.

R.A.: Steve's artwork is in the style of, say, a **Neal Adams**, which is what I call exaggerated reality. **Neal Adams**' characters really look no more like a real human being than **Steve Ditko's** do, but he's so good at what he does that he creates the illusion that if a real human being were in this situation, or was wearing this costume, that's what it would look like. Steve can do that. Obviously, we're not talking photorealism in the sense that there are no women with wings flying over Dallas at the moment...

DENNIS: There aren't? *(Laughter.)*

R.A.: Dennis was out all night looking for them.

DENNIS: That's why I came out here.

JOHN: Dennis, if there were any, R.A. would've already asked her for a date.

R.A.: But if there *were* a woman with wings flying over D/FW, she'd probably look close to the way Steve represents her.

JAMES: *Steve, off the subject of Ellie for a moment, could we clear up something I find confusing? Among your credits you list "penciller for SHATTER." I think some people would like to know how you could pencil a computer-drawn comic.*

STEVE: Rick Oliver did an editorial piece on that. What I did was finished pencil artwork. I submitted that, and it was, essentially, digitized and enhanced by a separate artist who works on a computer. He's a very good computer artist, but he'd never done comics, and wasn't able to tell a story in comics terms, so that's what they hired me to do. **Mike Saenz** had left, and I was only asked to do two issues so they could wrap up the story that had been running for so long, but it turned out that the

finished product was well enough received that they wanted to continue the series. **Peter Gillis** was brought back to write it, and I stuck around for three more issues.

JAMES: *What did you think of the final product?*

STEVE: Well, I was a little unhappy with it, because of the way it came out after the amount of time I'd put into drawing the pages. But that was more the fault of the printer than any creative person's fault.

JAMES: *Do you see a future in using computers in doing comics?*

STEVE: Yeah, but not PCs. Unless you have a laser printer that can print linework as well as it can print lettering, I don't see any future in that. There are computers that can be used in comics, similar to the computers used in Hollywood animation, but they're, like, $40,000 computers. I can't honestly say I was interested in SHATTER in the first place. I know nothing about computers, myself, and I accepted the assignment essentially to do two issues. I allowed myself to be talked into staying on for a while, but my interest just wasn't there. I gave **Rick Oliver** notice that I was leaving the book, and I told him why, and he had no problem with that. A couple of weeks after that, I got a phone call from **Tom Floyd**, who'd called **Kerry Gammill**, asking him to do a fill-in issue of EPSILON WAVE. Kerry was up to his ears in work, and he suggested me. I wasn't familiar with the book, and had to go out and look at it before I could give him a final answer, but when I discovered that the characters were operating here where I live, that did it for me. So many comics are set in New York City, and the artists who live there can research that atmosphere easily, just by looking out the window. Now that's something I can do, too.

JAMES: *Tom, in the first issue of SEADRAGON, you lined him up for a cross-over in EPSILON WAVE #6. Do you intend to do a lot of that, to have the same "universe" among the company-owned titles?*

TOM: We haven't really talked about our universe, but I think if the story calls for

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Steve Erwin
Occupation. Artist
Born: 12 January 1960
Residence: Euless, TX

Training: Technical school, some commercial art background, five years as a petroleum draftsman. I used to do some portraiture. As far as comics go, I'm largely self-taught.

Credits: Featured as new talent in MARVEL AGE #33. For First Comics, did finishes over Timothy Truman in GRIMJACK #19, inks over Tom Sutton in GRIMJACK #20, and pencilled the "Munden's Bar" stories in GRIMJACK #s 18-20. Also pencilled SHATTER #s 3-7. Pencilled the illustration of The Monocle for DC's WHO'S WHO.

"We just basically jumped into the deep

it. I don't have any problem with that. But if something comes along that needs to stand on its own, like THE TWILIGHT AVENGER, which is a creator-owned book anyway, and takes place in the Thirties — and the NIGHTWOLF mini-series that R.A. and Butch are working on — that kind of continuity hasn't been one of our major considerations.

R.A.: I had some problems with that cross-over when I came on board, but obviously there was nothing I could do by then. I could understand why Tom and Carl had structured it the way they had. It makes sense, because comic fans today are so continuity-conscious, they like cross-overs, team-ups, that sort of thing. I feel that Elite rushed it, though. It would have been better to have established Seadragon and the EPSILON WAVE characters. Let it be known that they do exist on the same world, but not bothered with actual cross-overs and such until they had established a direction for each of them in their own right. Once that's done, then the *situation* would dictate that sort of thing. If someone comes up with a good idea as to why Seadragon might show up in an EPSILON WAVE story, or vice versa, I don't have a big problem with that. But as a rule...well, the Nightwolf character, for instance, I'd rather keep separate from the other Elite characters at this point. Then sometime in the future, if we decide — this is news to Tom, I guess *(laughter)* — if we decided some other time that something interesting might be done along the lines of a team-up, we'd do it then.

JAMES: *Butch, besides the NIGHTWOLF project, what else are you doing?*

BUTCH BURCHAM: I'm inking THE TWILIGHT AVENGER...SEADRAGON...and I'm also inking something for another company, THE MIRACLE SQUAD for Fantagraphics, over Terry's pencils, and John's writing that, too. What else am I doing? I'm pencilling and doing partial inking on the "Scimidar" strip for **Reggie Byers** that R.A. wrote.

JAMES: *What do you do in your spare time?*

BUTCH: Terry and I are working on some storyboards for a TV commercial — *(explosive laughter from the entire group)* — and we're going to look into doing an advertising cartoon on a daily basis for a major autoparts store, and —

R.A.: He's also trying to invent the 28-hour day.

JAMES: *Tell us about NIGHTWOLF.*

BUTCH: The way that came around was, back in 1982 I was corresponding with **Joe Staton**, who was art director for First Comics. He was looking at my portfolio, and he said he liked my work, but First was so small at that time that he didn't have any place for me in their books. But what they did need was a bona fide superhero, and could I do that? So I took some sketches of Nightwolf to Joe, who said, "I like that. What kind of story do you have with it?" And I said, "Well, I was thinking about a man and woman walking down the street late at night, and a thug jumps out with a gun and kills them, and their son grows up, and this wolf jumps through his window..." *(Laughter.)* I was stuck, because I'm not really a writer at all. **Mike Baron** suggested that he might write it, but we never could come to any kind of agreement on the character. I wanted a mystical, supernatural kind of hero, and his ideas were just totally the opposite of mine, so it never went anywhere. Then when I met these nice people at Elite, they liked the character sketches enough to commit to doing a book, and then I met R.A., and he volunteered to write it.

R.A.: As it worked out, our minds were on similar wavelengths, because the idea that began to grow in my mind just from seeing the sketches played into areas of mysticism and fantasy combined with traditional elements of super-heroics, and those were all areas of great interest to Butch.

BUTCH: Oh, yeah. When I first saw R.A.'s synopsis, it was like, what more could I ask for? I like Batman, Dr. Strange, Conan — characters who get down to business like that — and R.A. took the elements I like from those kind of stories and put them into a new kind of super-hero saga. I wanted a character that wasn't a wimp, the kind of hero who sees he has a job to do, and just goes out and plucks the bad guy's heart out. He's that kind of character. I'd like to see him make Wolverine look like a wimp. I think R.A.'s done a great job with it.

JAMES: *I'm looking at some sample pages, and he literally does pluck the bad guy's heart out...*

BUTCH: Well, that's part of R.A.'s storyline, and I don't want to give too much of that away. There's a legitimate reason for it, but it's not like that's all he ever does, either.

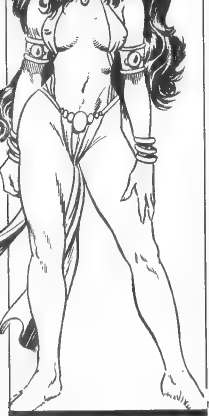
JAMES: *Still, this is more violent — or maybe more graphically violent — than anything else I've seen from Elite. Tom, do you have a problem with that?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Butch Burcham
Occupation: Artist
Born: 3 April 1952

Training: Graduated from Midwestern School of Lettering and Design. In 1980, I was assistant to Tony DeZuniga. I was only with Tony a few months, but since he does about 100 pages a month, I got a lot of experience in a short time.

Credits: My first published work was in the 1983 DC SAMPLER, doing inks over a WORLD'S FINEST ad. I'm inking SEADRAGON, THE TWILIGHT AVENGER, and THE MIRACLE SQUAD. I did the first episode of "Scimidar" in SHURIKEN. Right now, I'm also pencilling NIGHTWOLF for Elite.



water and almost broke our necks."

TOM: Well, it's a shocker, that's for sure. *(Laughter.)* Oh, we were surprised at some of this, at first, because Butch's original proposal didn't have any of these bizarre scenes in it. But we knew that R.A. was working the concept over from scratch, and it's not like anything was put in just for shock value. Well, really, I'm kind of torn between how much violence it's okay to put into a comic, and what's unhealthy, what's gruesome. I'm not into doing anything just super gory. I'm not into things like splatter movies. I'd like to be a little more subtle than that. But I don't think it's right to just back away, either, and have everything violent happen off-panel, because I owe it to R.A. to get the realism of his story down.

TOM: I don't have any problem with that. In the overall view of the storyline, Nightwolf's justified in what he does. The first time I read it, it brought back the feeling of the old-time comics to me. It reads like an EC horror tale with super-heroes, and you sure can't complain about that.

JAMES: *So what are your plans for the character?*

R.A.: There'll be an eight-page preview piece running in a one shot called ELITE PRESENTS #1 this fall, and then as soon after that as possible, we'll go with a four-issue mini-series. Of course, like any mini-series, if it's well done — and, more importantly, well-received — it'll go into production as a regular series.

JAMES: *Well, you've given us a pretty good picture of what's happening, and what's about to happen, with Elite Comics. Does anybody have something they'd care to throw in before we wrap this up?*

R.A.: I have something on the Elite philosophy. The first impression I got from Carl and Tom was that they really care about what they're doing — which may not sound like much of a statement, but we all know that there are publishers who will deliberately publish what they consider to be trash, so long as it's profitable trash. Tom and Carl, though, honestly care about publishing good books that people will want to read. After all, they started out doing their own writing and pencilling, but they're the first to admit that they're not the greatest writers and pencillers, and now they've brought in other people to do those things. And I think that's the primary goal here: whoever can do the job and do it well, let's use them and not let ego get in the way. And they're trying to be honest not only with themselves, but with the readers, the fans. Too many times, comic publishers forget that there's an audience out there that's composed of *people* — not demographics, age groups, gender, whatever — but people just like you and me. I think we all agree that if you put your money down and take an Elite comic book home, you've got the right to say anything you damned well please to us. A lot of the comic fans out there are people who need to be heard, and we want them to know that we're willing to listen. People form very special relationships with comics and the people who create them and publish them. We can become part of these people's lives. And I think that's something we should all cherish.

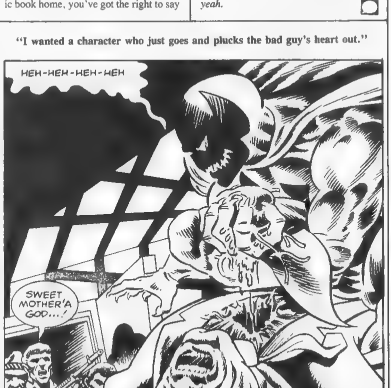
JAMES: *And on that note, let's end the way we began, with the pair who started all this. Carl, knowing what you do now, what do you think you would have done differently at the start?*

CARL: I wouldn't have printed 50,000 copies of EPSILON WAVE #1. *(Laughter.)* We just basically jumped off into the deep water without checking the bottom, and almost broke our necks. But I think people are starting to see that we're out there, now. I'm feeling real excited about the future.

JAMES: *And, Tom — now that you've had a taste of what it's like to actually live out a dream — do you plan to stick with it?*

TOM: Oh, yeah. *(Pause. Laughter.)* *Oh, yeah.*

"I wanted a character who just goes and plucks the bad guy's heart out."



"Be like rabid dogs, chase cars and bite

the moving tires...Bowl with the sun."

BOB BURDEN

In part one of this interview, many a truth was spoken in jest, Communists were given their comeuppance, the essence of comics was contemplated, and the origin of The Carrot was revealed.

In this issue: Bob Burden, creator/writer/artist of the popular surrealist comic THE FLAMING CARROT, reveals his secrets of seduction, gives his opinion on the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby controversy, and gives his fans a sneak preview of projects in the works.

JACK MALLETTE: *I'm going to comment on two things I've noticed about you, and I want you to tell me how they relate to THE FLAMING CARROT. First, you wear penny loafers...*

BOB BURDEN: Mm-hmm.

JACK: *...and you keep quarters in your penny loafers.*

BOB: Actually, they're Canadian nickels with beavers on 'em. They give me good luck with women.

JACK: *I think that's all that needs to be said there! (Laughter.)*

BOB: Women do notice footwear! If you're going to buy something to pick up girls with, don't buy a car with a landau roof, or a sports car...

JACK: *Or a gold chain.*

BOB: ...or a gold chain. Buy shoes first. And take a girl along to help pick them out!

JACK: *Take note, guys.*

BOB: *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *The other thing is, in your kitchen, you have this framed photograph from the 1940s of this guy, obviously a real person, named Texas Charlie, World's Largest Mop Manufacturer. And in the photo, he's obviously so proud of that fact, and, as you say, characters like this do exist. How does this relate to the Carrot? Is the Carrot just your way of coping with the dichotomy of the world?*

BOB: The Carrot is basically my way of dealing with the fact that I'm really disappointed that we aren't living in a time of genuine characters. You know, entertaining people to have around. **Gabby Hayes** was a character. **Jonathan Winters** is a character.

JACK: *Lester Maddox.*

BOB: Yeah, and **Ted Turner's** a character. That's the only way you can appreciate him!

JACK: *He really is. He doesn't care about anything!*

BOB: Yeah, he's goofy, and he...you read that PLAYBOY interview aloud to a room full of people at a party, and within four or five minutes they'll start picking up on it, and they'll bust out laughing! See, he's on the same level as the Flaming Carrot, only he's a little more. The Carrot's very much like **Ted Turner**, in that he's a little egocentric, but he's not self-conscious about being egocentric, like **Ted Knight** or anything like that; he's just

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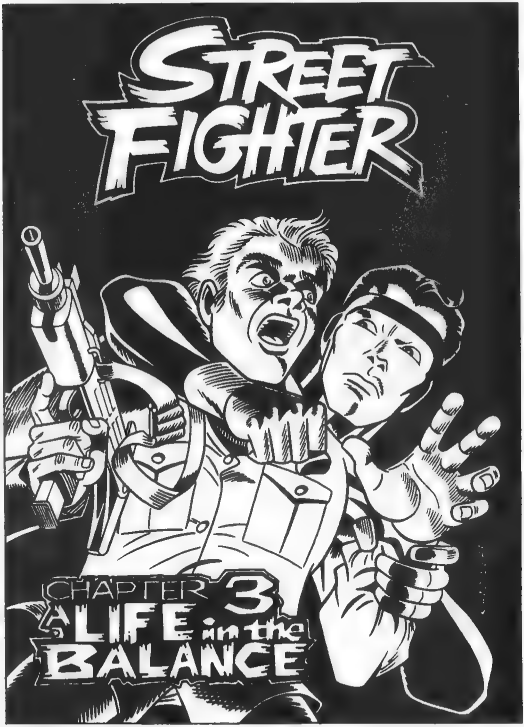
COMING THIS FEBRUARY



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OCEAN COMICS

"the new wave in quality"

"That's why J.R. Ewing is popular..."

totally innocent. It's a lovable kind of egocentricity. That's what Ted Turner has, and that's what the Carrot has.

One reason I think a lot of people like the Carrot is — he's happy. He's a happy character! That's why J.R. Ewing is always a popular character, because he's not your ordinary villain. He's a happy man! He always has a smile on his face, he's always cocky and arrogant. And people like that! Good guy, or bad guy, being full of life.

Another thing about J.R. Ewing, and DALLAS, and things like that, has to do with the responsibility of the media. We've got to watch what we put on television, and what we export over to these other countries. Because these people over in these other countries do not understand America, and we could be giving them the wrong impression. Let me give you an example of people's gullibilty: When my dad was a little kid, he'd go in and watch movies at the theater, and there'd be people sitting in the row behind him who did not know what was real; Frank Buck, Bring 'Em Back Alive, was that real? Or was Flash Gordon real?

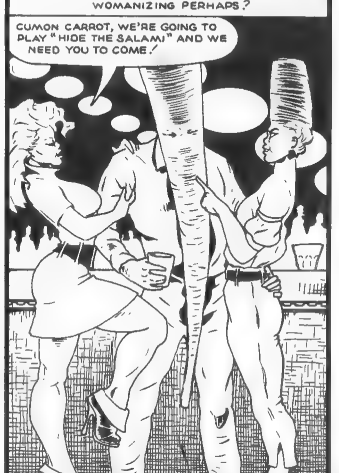
JACK: *Really?*

BOB: Yes. *Yes!* And these people exist out there today! And the arrogance of the average intellectual is only topped by their ignorance in thinking these people don't exist.

There are people out there who would never enjoy the Carrot, who would never enjoy a comic book, who would never enjoy anything. They're a "neuter" as far as taste or enjoyment of art is concerned. And in our society, which has been infected venomously with egalitarianism, people think that because *they* like something, everyone else is going to like it, too. Artists should never lose sight of the fact that there are people out there who are going to hate something like the Carrot. They're gonna see that thing, and they're gonna hate it! Somebody's gonna love **Gene Rayburn**, and somebody else is gonna hate him. And this is one of the beautiful things in the world: that's the way things are.

Now then, getting back to the media. When we ship something like THE WALTONS overseas, this is real good, because it shows that America has working class families, and the whole family concept is something that everyone can identify with and enjoy. And they look at America, and they say, "Gosh, America really is a decent place, and they're really human after all."

But when we send over DALLAS, and they see all these rich people running


WILL HIS LUCK EVER RUN OUT? WHAT WILL BE HIS DOWNFALL?.. HIS WILD CAROUSING, PARTYING AND WOMANIZING PERHAPS?
CUMON CARROT, WE'RE GOING TO PLAY "HIDE THE SALAMI" AND WE NEED YOU TO COME!

around, and this is being beamed into homes in South America where people live like cockroaches piled up on one another, fourteen people in a room the size of a cigar box, and they're seeing J.R. Ewing and all this splendor and waste... we've got to watch out that people don't get the impression that every American who wears a cowboy hat is J.R. Ewing!

JACK: *I'm going to title this interview "THE FLAMING CARROT, Lament for a Dead Society."*

BOB: *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *I have this customer who's a lawyer in a small Mississippi town, and he comes to Jackson once or twice a month to buy The FLAMING CARROT and to go to a punk rock bar with his girlfriend. He's a closet Carrot freak.*

BOB: Maybe he's a Flaming Carrot freak and a closet lawyer. *(Laughter.)* That's one way of looking at it!

JACK: *Yeah, he'd like that.*

BOB: The point is, our society's becoming more pluralistic. We have more freedom to do this, that, and the other thing than at any time in our history. Yet we have more things to do, more to watch on TV, more... they had freedom in the 1920's, but there were no TV sets. There were no major league baseball games being broadcast on TV, things we take so much for granted today.

JACK: *People were more limited to their own neighborhoods, and the concept of the neighborhood's almost gone out the window today.*

BOB: The concept of the neighborhood's a good thing. I think people live better, live longer and happier when they have

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TITAN BOOKS

"My theory is that 99% of all art is shit."

a neighborhood that exists around other people. It's really sad we've been shut off from all that. I watch The HONEYMOONERS with envy, having a buddy like Ralph Kramden or Ed Norton to go out and do things with. This hardly exists anymore.

JACK: *A Norman Rockwell painting, whereas nowadays you get things like REPO-MAN.*

BOB: You're right. Exactly. ROAD WARRIOR. It's not as much a democratic society, or even a repressive society, as it is a consumerist society. The pagan idol of consumerism is the common denominator in today's society. People are more consumerist than they are political, or even religious.

JACK: *And the grease that makes consumerism go is convenience. You need to do a consumerist issue of THE FLAMING CARROT.*

BOB: Oh, yeah. Well, I've got an idea for a new series called THE CHEAPSTERS, which I would just like to edit, not draw, and the whole plot revolves around these people who spend their lives trying to find, like, the cheapest gas station, or going across town to get the best deal on a sofa, things like that, and all the weird, zany adventures they would get into.

JACK: *Contemporary flea market decor in the house?*

BOB: Not especially that. They would be like normal people, except they're just so damn cheap! How many times have you seen somebody in the situation where, if they'd just spent 18¢ more on something, it wouldn't have broken? This idea of "maybe I'll get it cheaper down the road." Somebody sees a copy of THE

QUADRANT

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"Michael Jackson revived the music industry."

The Stickey Wickets

FLAMING CARROT #1 going for fifteen or twenty bucks, and he says, "Nah, I'll get it cheaper somewhere down the line," and then he goes and spends eighteen bucks on a HOWARD THE DUCK #1, or something like that, and a year or two down the road THE FLAMING CARROT #1 is going for seventy-five or one hundred dollars, and the HOWARD THE DUCK #1 is ten bucks, or five! People are cheap! They hesitate when they see a copy of LOVE & ROCKETS for fifty or one hundred bucks, but that book is so good, so iron-clad good, that it has to be worth a small fortune someday.

JACK: *And it's genuinely scarce.*

BOB: Yeah, only four or five thousand were printed.

JACK: *It's not like some things, like some comic-book companies which advertise THUNDERCATS #1 as "rare." Give me a break!*

BOB: And they also have large quantities of them, that's why it's considered by them to be rare. They're not fooling anybody.

Speculation in comic books is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it's a bubble that can burst. On the other hand, without the speculation, without the hype, the whole field slows down. There's not something "hot" out there, there's not a "star." It's the same way **Michael Jackson** almost single-handedly revived the music industry, by being hot. It brought everybody up a peg or two, and it brought people back into the record stores.

In the old days, there was EC Comics, then there was Marvel. Each one made an explosion, then there were these slack periods. Then along comes **Barry Smith**'s CONAN...

JACK: *Revolutionary! That's what got me back into comics.*

BOB: Right, and the direct market might have taken another ten or fifteen years to develop if it hadn't been for that. If there had been a long dead space there, it would have been dangerous. Then HOWARD THE DUCK came along, then **Dave Sim**'s CEREBUS..

JACK: *Then ELEQUEST, to a certain extent.*

BOB: Right, then I came along with THE FLAMING CARROT. See, I was ahead of my time with the Carrot. Now all the #1s of all this independent stuff are doing real well, and I was in the "Golden Age" of the direct comic market. See, time is becoming more and more compressed. We've already gone through the Golden Age of the direct market, which was, like, 1975 to, oh, 19...

JACK: *1981.*

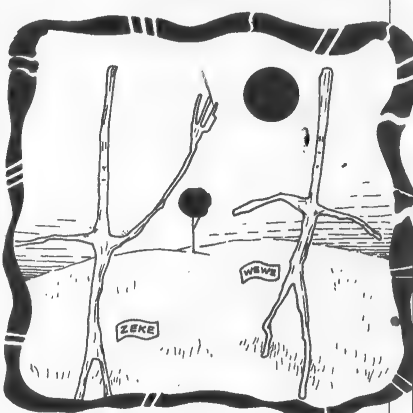
BOB: Yeah, right. **Dave Sim**'s CEREBUS #1 will probably be the ACTION #1 of the direct market, O.K.? And I'll be something like a...I don't know, a WONDERWORLD #3 or something.

JACK: *WHIZ #1.*

BOB: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, WHIZ #1! But you have these "crusader avatars" that rise up like Muhammad, and rally the people, and get things going again, like CEREBUS did, and like the rest of us did, to a certain extent. We showed it could be done.

Right now there's a glut of these new direct market titles, and everybody that can put pen to paper has decided to become a comic book artist. I could sit

Watch out, world — Here come THE STICKEY WICKETS, an upcoming Bob Burden production.



"The entire output of some comics companies

here and be real liberal, and say, "hey, this is good," but I don't think so. Sure, everybody should be able to do what they want to do, but on the other hand, pretty soon it gets to a point where you're just buried in shit, and you can't see the good stuff from the bad stuff.

I have a theory for an art movement, and it's going to be called "Defenestration," from the Latin "de," meaning out of, and "fenester," meaning window. It's derived from the Defenestration of Prague where, in 1607, the students at the University in Prague didn't like what the professor was saying, and they threw him out the window. The basic principle of my theory is that 99% of all art is shit.

JACK: *And repetitive.*

BOB: And repetitive, and it needs to be destroyed. So what we would do is, instead of creating art, we would thin it out a little bit. Instead of adding to it, we would subtract from it.

What we'd do is go to a museum, take it over, and start throwing artwork out the window. People'd say, "Who are you to judge?" And I'd tell 'em! If two people see a piece of artwork, and one says, "I like it, let's keep it." And the other one says, "No, I don't. Let's throw it out," the negative carries! Throw it out the window, because you can always do more!

Now, of course, this is all rhetoric, it's a point of view. But do you see what I'm saying? The entire output of some comic-book companies could disappear from the face of the earth, and it wouldn't affect us one iota. This attitude that everything in the world has to be preserved is totally ridiculous.

JACK: *That sounds strange coming from someone who has, and still enjoys, I'm sure, a roomful of really esoteric material. Comic books, pulps, movie lobby cards . . .*

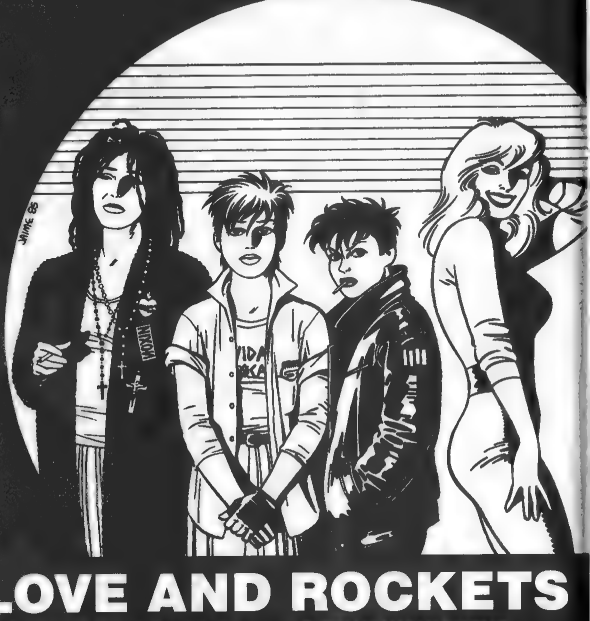
BOB: I've come full cycle. I've gotten to the point where I can just enjoy it for what it is. I had a complete Marvel collection, SPIDEY #1 up, even the pre-superhero Marvels, and all that stuff. Then one day in 1979, I sold them all. It was really a weird feeling, seeing all that stuff go out the door. But I just reached a point where I realized I didn't care for most of that crap. I lost interest in it. So I just turned around and looked out the window, and saw the beautiful world out there, and said, that's it! You reach a point where you mature, and you realize that most of these things you just don't care about. They're like a stack of paper plates, they're all the same.

Now, I do collect original art by artists I like, and admire. I just recently bought **Crumb** pages, and I've got this **Dick**

could disappear from earth without affecting us."

An as-yet-unfinished surreal strip by Bob.

THE BEST COMIC OF THE '80s?



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"...I could end up starving to death..."

Briefer FRANKENSTEIN page that I really treasure, and two ADAM STRANGE pages by **Carmine Infantino** and **Murphy Anderson** in my collection. And I'd like to get a couple of **Jack Kirby** pages. **Jack Kirby** wants his artwork, too.

JACK: *Right. You and I talked with Stan Lee about this at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair the other night. What are your ideas on the subject?*

BOB: I think they should have taken care of the whole situation as soon as it came about. They should have gone in there with a briefcase full of cash and a bunch of legal papers and gotten the whole affair settled. They should have nipped it in the bud, but instead the whole thing has kind of snowballed. It's totally ridiculous.

Artists should get to keep their art, and I think **Jack Kirby** is entitled to his, but that's not the point. The point is that, in the '50s and '60s, this is how it was done. There's a legal term for it, "business as usual," I think. **Kirby** knew going in what the situation was. And in the '50s, when **Kirby** had his own studio producing art, I wouldn't be surprised if he had a lot of his own art destroyed himself!

JACK: *Neither would I. This is the point Stan Lee had to make the other night. He said that he could make all kinds of trouble about who created which characters, and who owned the rights to what, if he wanted to. But he knew the situation when he went in, and there's no sense crying about it now. He also said that he likes Jack Kirby a lot, and that he doesn't know how all this resentment got started.*

BOB: And another thing, that artwork was available in the '60s, all **Jack Kirby** had to do was to ask for it! **Jim Steranko** worked for Marvel in the '60s, and he said he wanted all his artwork, and they gave it to him then.

JACK: *And Stan said that whenever artists would come to him and ask him for artwork, he'd say, "Sure, go ahead."*

I also know for a fact that, in the '60s, whenever fans would show up at Marvel, they'd give them a piece of art or two to take home.

Now, when you started doing comics in the early days, Bob, you'd go to the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, and people'd know you there, but you didn't even really have a lot of fans there, either. Your work was largely unknown. The other guests who would come would have people lined up waiting for sketches and autographs, and you'd sit there with your Amusing Babies and draw. Did you ever think, "One day, people are going to wake up and realize this is some pretty interesting stuff," did you think it would take off like it has?

BOB: Mmmm...I never really conceived of how good it would do, or how bad it would do — *doing it* was the main concern. I fully realized that I could end up like **H.P. Lovecraft**, starving to death while doing something good. Or sometimes I'd look at it and think that maybe I'd end up on the **Johnny Carson** show, or something like that. Sort of like **Robert de Niro** in THE KING OF COMEDY, but not that deranged.

WHILE INFORMED INSIDERS SCOFF AT THE THEORY THAT HIS SIMPLE, ALMOST RETARDED, STATE OF MIND WAS CAUSED BY READING 5000 COMIC BOOKS... HIS PLAIN "DUMB LUCK" IS WELL RENOWNED!...
THE TICKING STOPPED! THE QUARTER LODGED BETWEEN THE TUMBLERS AND THE GYRO IN THE DETONATOR BOX!
HE DID IT! WE CAN DEFUSE THE CHARGES NOW!
I JUST THOUGHT IT WAS A COKE MACHINE!
BOM SOM

RED HUMBUG'S COMIC FANS

WE'RE HERE TO INTERVIEW RENEGADE PRESS PUBLISHER DENI LOUBERT ABOUT HER NEW TITLE, HOLIDAY OUT!
WELL, RED, WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT OUR NEW BOOK OF COMIC STRIPS--
STRIPS?!? COMIC STRIPS? ER... I DON'T DO COMIC STR--
I'M SURPRISED AT YOUR PREJUDICE AGAINST COMIC STRIPS, RED!
I'M MORE INTO COMIC BOOKS AND STUFF!
A LOT OF TALENT HAS STRIPPED, RED!
YEAH, WELL, IT'S NOT MY THING, DENI.
AND HOLIDAY OUT'S CHOCK FULL OF RAW TALENT LIKE--
PLEASE. STOP.
GRASS GREEN, WHO HAS WORKED FOR MANY MAJOR COMICS PUBLISHERS AND HELPED FOUND FANDOM!
BOY, IT'S LATE! WHAT'S THE TIME?
11 A.M. P.M.
WHICH IS IT? A.M. OR P.M.?
A.M. P.M.
WAYNE TRUMAN, WHO INKS EXTENSIVELY FOR ECLIPSE COMICS.
'BAD'S LOOKIN' AT YOU.'
AND CHARLES T. SMITH, WHOSE WORK HAS APPEARED IN CHARLTON COMICS.
NOW SURELY YOU'RE INTRIGUED ENOUGH TO TRY OUR NEW BOOK OF STRIPS!
OH! COMIC STRIPS! FOR A MINUTE I THOUGHT YOU WERE SELLING A BOOK WHERE--
COMICS STRIP! CAN YOU IMAGINE ROBIN WILLIAMS NUDE?! YUCK! PTOU! BARF!
SAY! THIS IS GOOD! REAL NAKED ENERGY! IT REMINDS ME OF THE WAY THE JAZZ BOP MUSICIANS
SERIOUSLY, FOLKS, HOLIDAY OUT IS GREAT! TRY IT!

Art: Duane Hanson
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HOLIDAY OUT

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Renegade Press

"I protected it from being counterfeited."

JACK: *Strange movie.*
BOB: Yeah, it was.
JACK: *Do you enjoy being recognized?*
BOB: Yeah, well, eventually you become used to it and enjoy it. But there's always this little alarm bell that goes off, and you become like a submarine that's submerging, and the depth charges are chasing after it.
JACK: *What's the publishing history of The Carrot?*
BOB: First there was VISIONS #1, with an 8-page story, and it was a limited edition. Each one was numbered and signed by one of the artists in the book.

JACK: *Limited to how many copies?*
BOB: One thousand copies, of which 100 to 200 were destroyed in a fire, or had printing defects.
JACK: *So there's 800 or so copies.*
BOB: Yeah, 800 to 1,000 copies. A lot of them were destroyed. Okay, then a year later, in 1980, we came out with VISIONS #2, another 8-page story, then VISIONS #3 in 1981. At the same time, I came out with the giant FLAMING CARROT one-shot.
JACK: *I remember you selling it at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair.*
BOB: Right. It came out, and dealers sold out of their stocks, and it became just a fond one-shot memory. Then we came out with the A/V series, and interest started picking up again.
JACK: *A/V being Aardvark/Vanaheim.*

BOB: Right. Now, this is something some people might care about. When I came out with the giant one-shot #1, it was supposed to be part of a series. And when we decided to do the FLAMING CARROT series for Aardvark/Vanaheim, for **Dave Sim,** we didn't know whether to start with #2, or start over with another #1. But a lot of dealers would get mad and not even carry the book if they can't get the #1, and you need the money. You need orders heavy on #1, and you need a lot of them out there. So we printed up 11,000 copies. We had orders for 9,000, and the book did very well. It wasn't an overnight sensation; people didn't quite know what to make of it. I'd say that's an understatement, there. It was a strange cultural oddity; it didn't fit into any categories.
JACK: *Okay, let's back up a second. Was the giant one-shot also a limited edition?*
BOB: Yeah, limited to 6,500 copies, each and every one serial-numbered on the back with a machine that's one of only ten in the country, and it used a foreign typography. I had the presence of mind to see that this "control number" would protect it from being counterfeited.

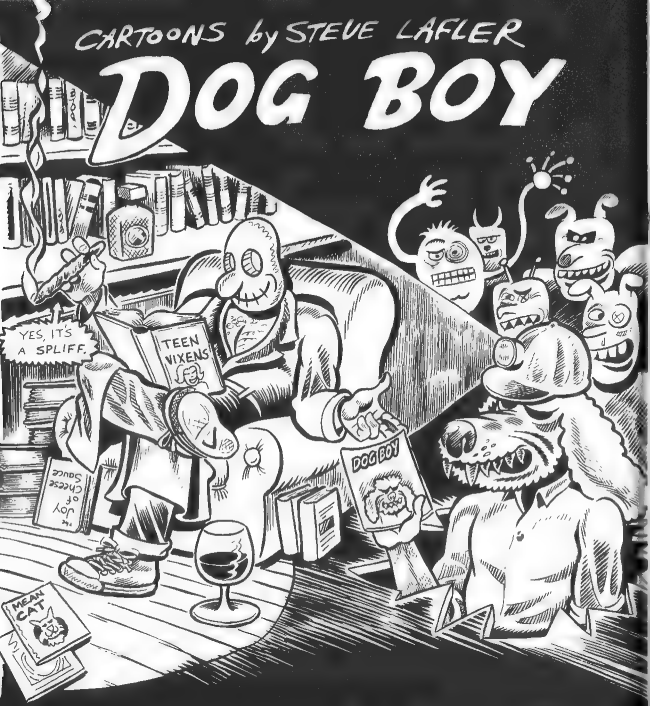
FLAMING CARROT
IN
I, CARROT...
AN UNMITIGATED EXPOSÉ...
AM I A KILLER?..YES. AM I A MONSTER?..PERHAPS. AM I INSANE?..HARDLY EVER! I AM FLAMING CARROT!!! EVEN BEST FRIENDS FEAR ME A LITTLE!
I AM THE FATE OF ALL THINGS THAT CROSS MY PATH. GOOD AND EVIL! I AM GRIM... AND HARSH... AND RIPE WITH FURY! I FIGHT AND KILL AND HOWL AND GET ALL BLOODY! I GO BOWLING WHENEVER I WANT.
YES!...THAT TERRORIST DEATH SQUAD!... IT'S A BLOODBATH HERE!...NO SURVIVORS!
YUK! THE CARROT STOMPED 'EM SINGLE-HANDED!

JACK: *Which is what happened to CEREBUS #1.*
BOB: VISIONS #2 was also serial-numbered and signed by one of the artists, and was limited to 2,000 copies.
JACK: *What about #3?*
BOB: #3 had an 8-page Carrot story in it, and had a print run of 2,500. We used to think it was 4,000, but we checked it out, and it was only 2,500.
JACK: *You used the word control, and you applied it to your work. You are a controlled person.*
BOB: Mm-hmm
JACK: *Your absurdity, your "madness," if you will, is controlled, it's focused. And I'm sure that most people, when they first meet you, are not expecting someone quite like you.*

Do people sometimes go out of their way to be a little zany around you? How do people react to you?

BOB: No, you'd sort of expect that, wouldn't you? As a matter of fact, **Dave Sim** was commenting on that one time, how the fans that come up to us at conventions are basically pretty level-headed, understated . . .
JACK: *Refined?*

BOB: Sure, and I treat them in a polite fashion, and they all seem to have a sense of humor, and they enjoy the book. They are generally people you wouldn't mind knowing in a normal life.
JACK: *Sort of like my punk-rocking attorney friend.*
BOB: Right. The Carrot attracts all ages, all groups. We have a particularly strong following among women. Women like the book, just like they like LOVE & ROCKETS. They like that book, too. And the one good thing about THE FLAMING CARROT is, the bigger it gets, the more



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"It's voyeurism for surrealistic adults."

popular it becomes, the more girls we're gonna have at conventions, and the better the parties are gonna be! *(Laughter.)*

Women have an attraction to, or an interest in, odd things. Look at the clothes they wear nowadays, and the hats they wore in the 1940s. What other creature on the face of the earth would ever conceive of wearing those goofy hats? Except maybe **Salvador Dali.**

Then we have some pretty sharp intellectual people who like it, and some kids that are 8, 10, 12 years old. They don't quite understand all of it, but they'd rather go out and play Flaming Carrot, and hop around on a super-powered pogo stick, than play, say, Green Lantern. They just get into the sheer voyeurism of it.

Actually, the Carrot is also a kind of voyeurism for a surrealistic adult. But it's similar, because what a child's doing is a surrealistic version of adulthood. THE FLAMING CARROT, in a way, captures that sense of wonder in childhood.

We also have a lot of blacks that like it! Whenever I'm at a convention, on a panel or something, I'll see a black person raise their hand, and it's usually for me.

JACK: *That's strange.*

BOB: Well, you don't see many blacks at comic conventions, or women, but that is changing. A lot of women like the Carrot, a lot of mohawk people, a lot of professionals. I always aimed at attracting people from outside the normal spheres of fandom. I wouldn't be surprised if the Russians liked The Carrot more than the Americans. We have a strong following in the frontier areas, such as Australia. We've gotten a lot of mail from over there, and it's been in the Sunday weekly magazine insert in Melbourne. And it's never been on the cover of an Atlanta magazine.

JACK: *What about England?*

BOB: England? I don't know much about that. I've gotten a few letters from over there, but I think the English are waiting for an English version of The Carrot, which may never come to pass.

JACK: *You mentioned earlier Salvador Dali, and I'm glad you did, because when I look at THE FLAMING CARROT, for some reason, the two things I think of are Amos 'n' Andy and Salvador Dali.*

BOB: That's an odd combination. I had

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#17

The Southern Knights find themselves in a world of sword-and-sorcery.
A world filled with fear.
A world ruled by evil.

A world of tyranny—and yet a world with a prophecy:

"When dragons return, the evil shall be driven out."

Story - HENRY VOGEL
Art - PEPPERS & PROPST

#18

While Dragon searches desperately for the Last Retreat of his kind, Connie, Kristin and Electrode strive to prepare the people of this world to fight for their lives and freedom.

Alas, before the Knights are ready, the forces of evil make their move!

Aided by Aramis, practitioner of the Forbidden Arts of magic, the Knights must attack before the prophecy is fulfilled!

Story - HENRY VOGEL
Art - PEPPERS & PROPST

"...Communists are *boring* people!"

a girl tell me one time that I was a cross between **Isadora Duncan** and **Gabby Hayes** *(Laughter.)* You know, this dichotomy. Amos 'n' Andy works. It's got this magic "ring" to it.

JACK: *A little rhythm.*

BOB: Yeah, and the other one that comes to mind is, someone said The Carrot was a combination of DR. ZHIVAGO and TAXI DRIVER. You know, Travis Bickle.

JACK: *That takes a little more work than Amos 'n' Andy and Salvador Dali.*

BOB: Yeah, it does! Now, Dr Zhivago I can see, because I do like to write, and I can really identify with him and his place in the Russian Revolution, not being part of it. Politics is so unimportant. I'm a relatively unpolitical person, and I'm one of the few people I know that could live — could survive — in a Communist state. It's not like the end of the world.

I've always come down pretty hard on the poor old Communists, but there are certain reasons for that. My main problem with Communists is, they're *boring* people! Everything they ever have to say is boring! On top of that, **Karl Marx**'s ideas were pretty specious. He would predict these things, and he would get them all backwards. And the third thing is, if Communism is some kind of an ideal, let's leave it an ideal.

It's like my attitude towards gun control. So many people believe they should have gun control; all right, let those people *not* own guns! But the people that believe they should own guns, let them own guns

And getting back to Communism: if Communism exists, why not make it voluntary? If you want to have a commune in your house, and let people come in and eat your food, and use your dishes, and you have to clean it up later, you're going to find out real quick that the only way Communism's going to work is if you run it like a first grade class.

The only people I've ever known that were Communists were by and large people with some kind of axe to grind, some kind of bitterness against society. It's an evil thing, it's a dangerous thing! If they like Communism, and they want it, let them go to a Communist country.

JACK: *You have another new character who made his debut in issue #13, Captain Commander. Are you going to have him battling the Evil Empire, or anything like that?*

BOB: Not really. Captain Commander's more or less just a figment, a stereotype. He's The Greatest Hero Of All The Worlds And All The Universes. And he's such a great hero that he comes from... somewhere else, of course.

It's the first time this stereotype's appeared, the all-powerful superhero. I mean THE most powerful! All the time the kids have been arguing, is the Hulk stronger than the Thing? Or is Thor stronger than Superman? This guy *is* stronger than the Hulk, he *is* stronger than Superman, he's stronger than everybody! And it never occurred to Marvel or DC to make a character like him, because they could never write a story around him! I don't think I could, either, so I'm just gonna leave him be. *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *I saw a few drawings lying around from a thing you're working on called ROBOT NIGHT, and they looked real interesting. Can you tell us what that is?*

BOB: Yeah, it's a project I started a

"Women like the FLAMING CARROT,

couple of years ago, and I never finished, because **Dave Sim** came along, and he said, "Bob, we want you to do a unique story," and I said, "Okay, why don't I do three stories?" and he said, "Hell, why don't we just do a series?" and that's how I got sidetracked. It's 97% finished.

I'm thinking about putting out a whole series of one-shots tailored to the direct market that are based on various projects I had on the drawing board when I started the CARROT series for Aardvark/Vanaheim. It's going to be like the old SHOWCASE was for DC, numbered sequentially, and all that, and I'm going to call it DRACONIAN FEATURES. It's going to be like the old FOUR-COLOR series, where they'd have Oswald the Rabbit, then they'd have Gene Autry, or maybe Tarzan.

I've always loved the concept of experimenting, of doing creative new things, research and development! That's me! The basement inventor! POPULAR MECHANICS and Gyro Gearloose! It was an American institution once. Now the same people are watching TV or working two jobs! Invention! And that is so much more important to me than being in the trenches, slogging out a new issue every month. I would've loved to have been there in Menlo Park at the turn of the century when **Thomas Edison** had twenty or thirty scientists all living and working in the same area, coming in to work each day and coming up with different inventions.

JACK: *And he'd take twenty or thirty minute cat-naps instead of going home and going to bed.*

BOB: Yeah, right. I would have loved to have run it, or I would have loved to have been the youngest one there, sweeping up, and just watching all these titans of creativity.

JACK: *Sort of a fly on the wall.*

BOB: Well, I don't know if I'd want to be a fly on the wall. They have such poor diets.

JACK: *(Laughter.)* You're right, they do. Is it ROBOT N-I-G-H-T ?

BOB: Hmm?

JACK: *Earth to Bob.*

BOB: Oh, yeah. I guess . . . maybe it's N-I-T-E. I don't know, I'd have to look it up. Details like spelling and all that I don't pay much attention to.

A good example of my attitude — I'm not this far gone, but it's something I can really identify with — is the Spanish philosopher **Unamuno.** That's his last name, I forget his first name. Details — again, I forgot.

Unamuno would come back from his job teaching at the university, and he'd knock on his apartment door for his wife to let him in, and she'd be running the vacuum cleaner, or something, and she wouldn't hear him. About an hour later, she'd come out the door going to the grocery store, and he'd just be standing there, lost in thought.

JACK: *(Laughter.)* You're kidding!

BOB: NO! He'd just be standing there, thinking! You see, most people in this country are so ruined by school, and by college — it's all in the books anyway, so we don't *have* to think.

JACK: *. . . and TV*

BOB: . . . and TV! So that type of mind, that deep-thinking mind does not exist, for all intents and purposes, in contemporary American society . . . or very rarely exists.

JACK: *So, what's up for The Carrot?*

BOB: THE CARROT is going to become quarterly, for a brief time, at least, and while I'm developing some of these other projects, it's going to remain the flagship title out there in front of the public. And it's going to stay like it is, limited.

just like they like LOVE & ROCKETS."

There's been some talk about reprinting THE FLAMING CARROT in a SWORDS OF CEREBUS-type format, but I'm taking my time on that. There's no big rush for me on it. I've had some hefty offers.

Also, we've got this new super-team, The Bikini Teens, which ought to have their own book. And I think I'll have somebody else draw it, because it's a big problem for me to draw the same characters over and over again in each panel, and get the caricatures looking right. I'm good at developing a character. I'm not good at drawing him day in and day out, over and over again.

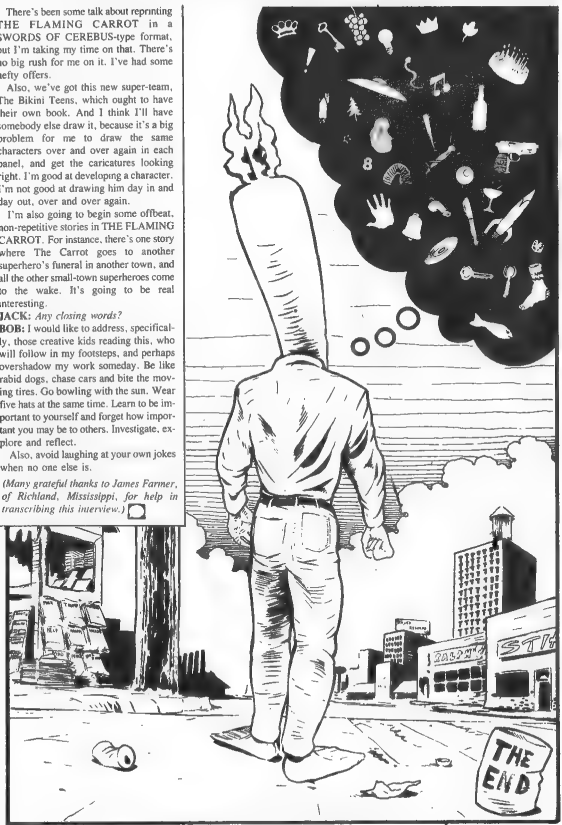
I'm also going to begin some offbeat, non-repetitive stories in THE FLAMING CARROT. For instance, there's one story where The Carrot goes to another superhero's funeral in another town, and all the other small-town superheroes come to the wake. It's going to be real interesting.

JACK: *Any closing words?*

BOB: I would like to address, specifically, those creative kids reading this, who will follow in my footsteps, and perhaps overshadow my work someday. Be like rabid dogs, chase cars and bite the moving tires. Go bowling with the sun. Wear five hats at the same time. Learn to be important to yourself and forget how important you may be to others. Investigate, explore and reflect.

Also, avoid laughing at your own jokes when no one else is.

(Many grateful thanks to James Farmer, of Richland, Mississippi, for help in transcribing this interview.)



"Somebody wanted me to do a naked Doctor

JACK KIRBY

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How do you write an introduction for a guy who needs no introduction? Should I take the historic approach — the early years, Betty Boop, Elsner and Iger? The Joe Simon collaborations? The Silver Age work for (ahem) Marvel? Shall I remind the industry of how we're all indebted to the King?

Somehow none of these seem apt introductions for this interview, which I consider to be about Kirby — the man. The thing that makes COMICS INTERVIEW stand out from all the rest is it gives readers an in-depth look at the diverse personalities behind the work, beyond the hype, and that's what this piece is about — will the real Jack Kirby now please stand up...

JACK KIRBY: There are no failures in life — just people who quit too soon. I believe everybody has the same potential I have the same potential to play the piano. Given time I could be **Paderewski**, but I have no inclination to play the piano. Given time, I'll never be **Paderewski**!

MARK BORAX: *(Laughter.)*

JACK: And it won't matter to me, see.

MARK: *You directed your energy in a different channel.*

JACK: Something captured my interest and I stayed with it.

MARK: *For a long time.*

JACK: For a *very* long time. Now I'm doing a different facet of it, and I'm doing it for people that I want to do it for — Ruby-Spears. I'm having a fine time. They're fine artists, we have a good relationship. They like the work, and I give 'em whatever they ask for. It's the professional thing to do. I'm content.

Strange...In keeping with the Vatican."

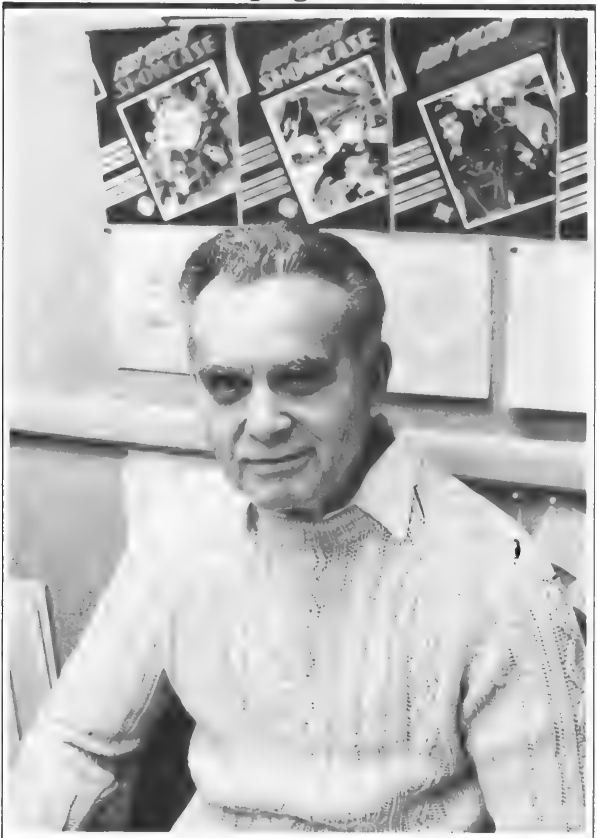

PHOTO: Albert DeGuzman for DC Comics Inc.

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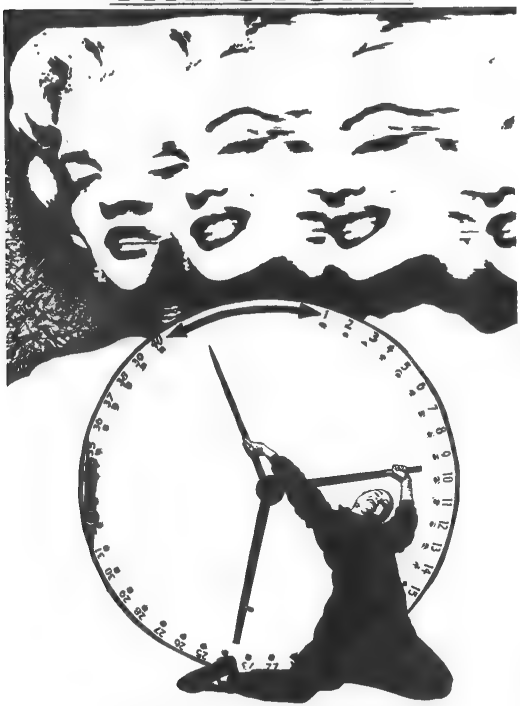

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"I began doing Betty Boop and Popeye."

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This five-step sequence from 1935 illustrates Jack's earliest work as an in-betweener for Max Fleischer. Drawings 2 and 4 are Jack's fill-ins of the animator's initial drawings. (Drawings 1, 3 and 5). Shot in sequence, the five sketches comprise one step by Popeye.

MARK: *How many hours a day are you putting in?*

JACK: I don't measure it in hours. I don't measure it in time at all. I measure it in solving a problem. I'll take whatever idea we share, and make certain it's practical for animation and exploitation. You've got to have both considerations these days. With the experience I've gotten in the comics field I can do TV and animation. I can give 'em a certain type of drawing, and the animator can tear it down for animation, and it'll be good.

MARK: *This isn't the first time you've worked in the animation field.*

JACK: Oh, I began in the animation field. I began doing BETTY BOOP and POPEYE. I was an in-betweener with the Fleischer Studios.

MARK: *What did an in-betweener do?*

JACK: At that time, it took sixteen pictures for a character to take one step. So they divided this step, say, between three guys, and I'd put in the in-between action of that particular one step. I'd do three or four pictures of that step, and when they put all of them together they'd have a clean movement of the foot. I can tell you that Fleischer did some beautiful animation. In fact, Fleischer and Disney took as much pain with their animation — they were the two main studios of the day, and extremely popular. Working with Fleischer was, I think, my first job. But they were gonna move to Florida, and I had to make the choice of staying in New York or going with them. I talked to my mother about it, and of course she wouldn't let me go.

MARK: *(Laughter.)* You were in Brooklyn?

JACK: No, I was still on the East Side, and, mothers being sacred, why, you took whatever word they handed out, and that went for *anybody* — Jewish mothers, Italian mothers, Irish mothers. Even Al

"No! That's wrong! I was never

The Blue Beetle
RELEASE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 1940
BEGINNING OF A BLITZKRIEG
THE BLUE BEETLE IS STUNNED BY THE BUNT END OF A STAVUETTE WIELDED BY KILLER CONWAY WHO SWIFTLY FOLLOWS UP HIS ATTACK!
THIS TIME SOMEONE GOING TO STAY DOWN, BEETLE!
THE BLUE BEETLE BEATS THE VICIOUS DOWNTHRUST WITH A FLYING TACKLE
FROM FEATURES SYNDICATE

"I was Charley Nicholas for a time when I was doing the BLUE BEETLE for The Boston Globe."

Capone's mother would ball him out in the middle of the street, somewhere, for not attending church that week. When I asked my mother if I could go to Florida with Fleischer she says "You can't — there's a lot of naked women down there. They'll pull you in an' I'll never see you again!"

MARK: *And of course the thought of being pulled in by naked women severely depressed you.*

JACK: *(Laughter.)* I rather enjoyed what I was thinking

MARK: *But you didn't go.*

JACK: Instead I found a small syndicated house which sent out weekly comic strips to 700 newspapers. They did editorial one-panel cartoons, and they gave me a one-panel column called "Your Health Comes First." So I became "Dr. Whatever-It-Was." I did home remedies. I mean, nothing that would alarm you.

MARK: *So you started in the field as a quack —*

JACK: It was my first quack. In order to make this little syndicate look larger, each cartoonist had about three different names, see. So I was **Jack Cortez**, and **Jack Curtis** — then I became **Jack Kirby**. **Jack Kirby** sounded great 'cause I loved FLASH GORDON and RIP KIRBY, so I remained **Jack Kirby**

MARK: *It wasn't kosher to keep your Jewish name in those days?*

JACK: No! That's wrong! I was never ashamed to keep my Jewish name. In fact, seeing a documentary at the San Diego Convention earlier this week startled me, because at that time having a pen name was par for the course. I was **Charley Nicholas** for a time when I was doing the BLUE BEETLE for the BOSTON GLOBE. It didn't bother me one bit, didn't bother my mother, my father. I brought the dough home from whatever job I had. If I wanted ten bucks I hadda ask my mother. I was almost 18 — in '38 or so. **Hitler** was coming on the scene, and he was an artist you know. If they hadn't panned his work…**Hitler** was just a guy coming out of a bar, ya know. And somebody said "Well, your work stinks." His work really did stink — he was a bad artist.

MARK: *And the rest of the world had to pay for it.*

JACK: It's true! If somebody had given the guy a compliment, there would have never been a Fuhrer.

MARK: *He might have been a comics artist.*

JACK: There probably would never have been a war. Except he came along at the right time. The newsreels used to show everybody going to buy an ordinary lunch with their money in wheelbarrows. The German people were miserable. **Hitler**

"It was my first quack. In order to make this little syndicate look larger, each cartoonist had about three different names."

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NEVER AIR FAMILY DIFFERENCES WHEN EATING... GLOOM AND TEMPER RUIN A GOOD MEAL!!!
REMOVAL OF THE TONSILS AND INFECTED TEETH, CURE MANY PHYSICAL AND MENTAL AFFLICTIONS!!!
192

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ashamed to keep my Jewish name."

by Charles Nicholas

came on the scene, in fact in one of my comic books I quote **Hitler** — in Glorious Godfrey of the NEW GODS. He's looking at this crowd and it amazes him. He says, "The entire crowd, while I was talking to them, had the same expression — it never wavered."

I think we have some association with baboons. If you watch baboons — the most dangerous animal in Africa — you'll find the leader jumping up and down on a rock while the tribe gathers around him. And the tribe won't move a muscle! While that baboon pounds on a rock and shrieks!

MARK: *Hitler at the Nuremburg Rallies.*

JACK: Right! And at a signal from the leader this baboon tribe will all go out and kill a leopard.

MARK: *Which could normally wipe out any three of them.*

JACK: Of course. But in force, the baboons make up a terrible beast. That's what the German people became at that time.

MARK: *So the capacity for great good and evil is inherent in everyone?*

JACK: Of course. I was dating my wife at the time Hitler was coming on, and I did this editorial cartoon which showed **Neville Chamberlain** patting a boa constrictor, and the boa had a bulge called Czechoslovakia. **Chamberlain** had just given Czechoslovakia to **Hitler**, okay. And the boa had **Hitler's** mustache. I showed it to my boss at the syndicate and he says, "How dare a 19-year-old like you do a cartoon like that? What do you know?" I says "Well, I was raised in an area where you had a lot of gangsters. I know what gangsters do. **Hitler's** gonna want war. You start jumpin' around and giving him what he wants, he's gonna feed on your weakness." And **Hitler** wanted more and more until there was a face-off.

MARK: *Like Dr. Doom.*

JACK: And Dr. Doom would take advantage of that. If you're backing off — he'll follow, see. It doesn't matter what the style is. Dr. Doom has a very sophisticated style, but he's still a gangster and he's gonna close in on ya in some manner. **Hitler** closed in, to a place where the others couldn't back away anymore and still retain face. So we had a war, and the war took all my friends.

Here I was getting married and no one was around. I'd walk on the boardwalk at night. **Joe Simon** was riding a horse for the Coast Guard on the beach because the Nazis had submarines in the Hudson River, and they were blowing up our ships. They'd send saboteurs in on rafts, but the jerks wouldn't go in and blow up anything 'cause they heard about Broadway! They'd go in and see our best shows.

You'd find a German standing in the Burlesque line. I remember I couldn't get in to see OKLAHOMA 'cause the Germans were standing in front and they got in to see the best shows. At any rate, the FBI used to pick these guys up 'cause they were the only guys on line talkin' German. *(Laughter.)* It was a funny part of the war.

Finally, I got drafted, and I felt half good about it because everybody was gone. I went for the War like everybody else, you know. Combat infantry, PFC. It wasn't a pleasant thing. When I came back Joe came out of the Coast Guard, finally, and we got him off the horse. We went back to Harvey, and then we went back to a lot of publishers. We did things for DC and we went on to publish our own books. We worked for Crestwood. We did BLACK MAGIC, which was some of our best work. I did FIGHTING AMERICAN for Crestwood. During the **McCarthy** period I had FUN COMMIES, I had RHODE ISLAND RED. I had a fading old actress named Theda Barracuda.

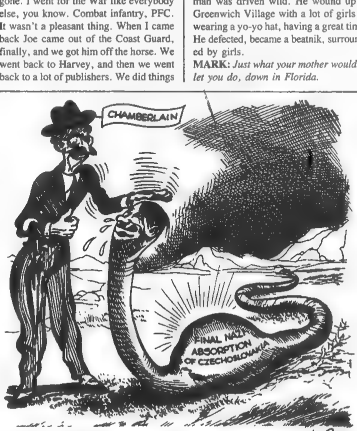
MARK: *Who played Cleopatra —*

JACK: Yes! Like **Gloria Swanson** in SUNSET BOULEVARD.

MARK: *With William Holden in the swimming pool — she shoots him in the opening scene.*

JACK: In this case, she wants to give him the kiss of fire, and he says, "Well, the kiss of fire didn't do much for my old man, an' it ain't gonna do much for me." Fighting American says that. I had a lot of fun with satire. I think it was one of the few times when satire was done for mainstream comics, and oh — I remember the Russian Superman wanted to fight Fighting American because we gave him a good uniform. He wanted the uniform, and the Russians gave him a second-rate uniform and he couldn't stand it. It was like long underwear. Fighting American had a classy uniform, which was like Captain America's. Well, the Russian Superman was driven wild. He wound up in Greenwich Village with a lot of girls — wearing a yo-yo hat, having a great time. He defected, became a beatnik, surrounded by girls.

MARK: *Just what your mother wouldn't let you do, down in Florida.*



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"Stan was production coordinator. But

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JACK: I had to do it vicariously. *(Laughter.)* Joe and I published our own line. We had FOXHOLE, we did stories with people who were actually in the services, we listed their rank and serial number to give it realism. And all our stories were realistic stories. We did the romance book, 'cause we appreciated girls, and we knew that they ran the world! The romance books sold very well, except the field was going downhill. So Joe left the comics and I went *(pause)* — to Marvel. Marvel was gonna close up on the afternoon I came in. I pulled 'em out.

MARK: *They kept the doors open for you?*

JACK: They kept the doors open and we went on to doing the kind of thing that saved that particular company.

MARK: *You and Stan Lee?*

JACK: Yeah. *(Pause.)* EC — the best company going — the one that was makin' the most money — they went out of business. Everybody was hanging on. Timely sold out to Cadence, I left in the middle to go back to DC, do the NEW GODS, and I did what I've always done — go from company to company, just do my best for each place. Going to Marvel became an effort on my part to galvanize the company. It was incumbent on everybody else who remained there to do the same thing. **Ditko** did it, **Johnny Romita** did it, **Marie Severin** was there, and she did a great job.

MARK: *You all saved a sinking ship?*

JACK: We sure as hell did! And all the way we didn't know what was gonna happen. We were in comics, that was what

the artists handled both story and art."

1945 — WWII ends, and infantryman Jack Kirby comes home to Brighton Beach, NY. The caption on the back of this photo reads "Army food lousy. Figure great!"

we wanted to do, and we saw to it that everything was fresh and new. **Steve Ditko**, I think, was the one that in my estimation developed SPIDER-MAN, kept him going, and kept him selling

MARK: *Was Steve doing a lot of the plotting of the original book, or was Stan doing all of it?*

JACK: The artists were doing the plotting — Stan was just coordinating the books, which was his job. Stan was production coordinator. But the artists were the ones that were handling both story and art. We had to — there was no time not to!

MARK: *'Cause you were putting out so many titles each month?*

JACK: I was doing almost *all* the titles! So SPIDER-MAN was given to **Steve Ditko**, and he did a wonderful job, he developed it, he made people interested in it. There was no time for the artist not to do it.

Actually, the HULK was gonna be discontinued after the third issue. Everybody was kind of on a downer, okay? So in comes these college guys from Columbia or NYU, and they get a list of college names — and they say "The Hulk is the mascot of our dormitory." I knew right away we'd got the college crowd —

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—Stan Lee

"Well done! Bravo!"
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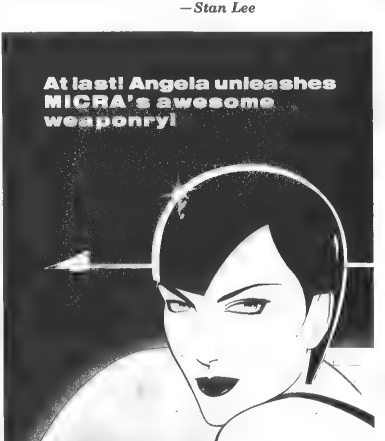

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"We got Marvel back on its feet."

which we never had before! This was the beginning of the, 60's, you know.

There we were, with a growing Hulk. I began to feel, "Keep the sonuvabitch going!"

We were doing a good job of it. We'd put every conceivable type of situation into whatever story we had, to keep it from being static. To make it different each issue so that people would follow it, and that's how the other characters came into the stories. We got the Inhumans, we got the first black man in comics.

MARK: *The Panther.*

JACK: The Panther. I got to hemming and hawing — "You know, there's never been a black man in comics." And I brought in a picture of this costumed guy which was later modified so he could have a lot more movement. Actually, at first he was a guy with a cape, and all I did was take the cape off and there he was in fighting stance, unencumbered. The Black Panther came in, and of course we got a new audience! We got the audience we should've gotten in the first place. We began to accumulate new readers and Marvel got back on its feet and then — *(pause)* — I left.

MARK: *Well, Jack, there was a bit of time between the point where Marvel got back on its feet and you left.*

JACK: Yes. There was a long period where we didn't know what was gonna happen. Nobody could call the shots, but it was moving and that was good enough. There was the potential of continued movement. Then I went back to DC and I began a novel —

MARK: *THE NEW GODS, FOREVER PEOPLE, MR. MIRACLE.*

JACK: I felt that comics were a legitimate form of literature, a valid medium — why not do a novel? And see what it's like. I felt I would define our own society. The Greeks defined it with their own gods, the Norsemen defined it with theirs. I says, "What the hell—"

MARK: *Kirby might as well define it with his own gods.*

JACK: No — *our* gods. Who are our gods? *(Pause.)* There's a Darkseid somewhere, who's too big for us, and who's in a position to say, "I want it all." You know there are guys like that — an' they're evil guys. They're not thoroughly evil but they're evil, because they're in a position to grab it all.

MARK: *And Darkseid operated on a much more powerful level than Dr. Doom. Darkseid wasn't a frustrated artist like Hitler —*

JACK: No, no — he was above a **Hitler** — and there always were people like that. He was a cosmic type of character, and so I made them all cosmic characters. I felt that maybe, somewhere deep in the Universe, there is a war where people have all these powers. Who's to say there isn't? The possibilities are that there are. I began looking for people other than gangsters. I got Galactus — where I suddenly found myself confronting God! Like God! I'd never seen a character like that myself! Suddenly — there he was — I

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Carol Lay's

GOOD GIRLS

"It had something to do with her hair. . ."
She's got the job
(love-lorn columnist for
a great metropolitan newspaper).
She's got the friends
(Ultra-Ma, Stupendo Boy).
She's got the costume
(covered with hearts, no less).
But she just can't fly!
She's Monica Saunders.
Ms. Lonelyhearts.
Oh, yeah.
She's got the hair,
too.

Find out why they're good.

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"I found myself confronting God!"

drew him. And he's about three or four stories high. He's standing on the Empire State Building.

I got the Silver Surfer, and I suddenly realized here was the dramatic situation between God and the Devil! The Devil himself was an archangel. The Devil wasn't ugly — he was a *beautiful* guy! He was the greatest of all the archangels. He was the guy that challenged God.

MARK: *That's the Surfer challenging Galactus.*

JACK: And Galactus says, "You want to see my power? Stay on earth forever!"

MARK: *He exiled the Surfer out of Paradise.*

JACK: And of course the Surfer is a good character, but he got a little bit of an ego and it destroyed him. That's very natural. If we got an ego it might destroy us People say, "Look at him — who does he think he is? We knew him when." They throw tomatoes at you. Of course, Galactus, in his own way, and maybe the people of his type, are also doing that to the Surfer. They were people of a certain class and power, and if any one of 'em became pretentious or affectacious, they would do the same thing. *We* would do the same thing. If a movie star walked past you and gave you the snub, you'd give him a hot foot just to show him, "I paid my money to see you — and that's what you're living on." You're not just a face in the crowd — you're a moviegoer, you plunk your dough down, and this guy lives off it.

MARK: *If things were different, would you like to be doing some of those characters again?*

JACK: I would do something different. I am doing something different. After I — I feel very lucky I got the time to develop to the point where I can pick and choose my characters. I can develop new characters. I began to grow with the knowledge that somewhere out there was a gap that I reach into and pull out characters that nobody'd ever seen before. Which I did! I pulled 'em all out, an' they were comin' thick and fast. Darkseid, Orion, the Black Racer, Kamandi. I did my work on KAMANDI — I satirized **McCarthy's** period. You'll see reality in the reflection of whatever I do. Not reality in the negative sense, not sleazy or anything. If I did the future of New York you'd love it, because it would be so positive that you'd say, "I'd love to live there." Because I'd have a great time. I don't believe in having a sleazy time. In fact, when the psychiatrist talked to me at the end of the war, he says, "You sonuvabitch — you had a real good time there, didn't you?" I did. I really did. Ordinarily a lot of guys found it miserable, but — maybe I innately like being in this kind of thing.

MARK: *Your work certainly deals with battle and conflict.*

JACK: It always did, ever since I was a young boy. I would wait behind a wall and three guys would walk past and I'd dash out and kick the bejabbers out of 'em. And then I would run!

MARK: *You were a real scrapper on the East Side?*

JACK: I had to be. You got so you liked it.

MARK: *Like the Bowery Boys.*

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"There was never a conflict between me

JACK: Or the Newsboy Legion. You had to do that, and you got to a point where you enjoyed it. I took judo in the army and out of a class of 27 just me and another guy graduated.

MARK: *Really?*

JACK: My lieutenant was hanging by boards, which they nailed his shoulders to. The whole class was like that, except for me and this other guy. So we got diplomas. Judo expert. I just happen to like that kind of thing.

MARK: *You view life as a struggle — a constant challenge?*

JACK: It *was* a struggle, especially for a little guy. I took it as it came. When I was courting my wife, dating her, there was about five guys in love with her. One guy was a piano player I grew up with, and I'd say, "Gee — you play real well!" and this guy would say, "Thanks," and I'd say, "Wouldn't it be a tragedy if all your fingers were bent backwards?" And he would get the idea. *(Thoughtful pause.)* That's a sad picture!

MARK AND JACK: *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Sounds like a little bit of the gangster in you, Jack!*

JACK: Well, it's the place where you live, it's the environment.

MARK: *New York was a struggle?*

JACK: Yes, but strangely enough, the school curriculum was excellent! I had **Shakespeare** in the 8th grade. I took five years of French, and during the War I was able to communicate with the Maquis — the French Resistance Forces. I did that on the walkie-talkie, you know. That was my job, I was a runner. Still to this day, I just talked a little with Moebius at the convention — that's a lot of fun. I was also able to talk with the Germans because I'm Jewish. I'd stand in front of 'em and they'd call me every name in the book. Some of those German prisoners were still arrogant! They'd call me names.

MARK: *On the radio?*

JACK: No, no — for real. I would stand next to 'em and listen to what they were saying, when I would bring some of 'em back as prisoners. I was a PFC with **Patton's** army. In front of Mertz. That's where **Patton** got stuck. 3rd Army. It was a terrible place. We were giving the Germans such a hard time. They hated us because they were pros at it and we were jerks and they couldn't predict what we were gonna do. So we gave 'em the devil of a time. They'd even get drunk and come out running. It got so my lieutenant would wave 'em past to the artillery guys, and the artillery guys would flick 'em like chickens, for souvenirs.

MARK: *Since so much of your work thrives on conflict, do you think that, like John Lennon and Paul McCartney, there*

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and Stan. I understood him very well."

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"I feel that Stan is cheating himself."

was a conflict between you and Stan that lent a kind of dynamic to the work you created together?

JACK: There was never a conflict between me and Stan. I understand Stan very well. There are times when — uh, I feel that he's cheating himself.

MARK: *In what way?*

JACK: By not — not enjoying life. By not being the guy he really could be. See — I mentioned this yesterday to him. I know his brother Larry has nothin' to prove — he knows who he is. **Larry Lieber**'s a wonderful guy, you could talk to him and you'll both have a great time. Stan is different, in many, many ways. Why, I don't know. I'm not a guy who's gonna stop long enough to define it. There are many ways I feel that Stan is cheating himself, by hiding somewhere. He's hiding. That's the feeling I get.

MARK: *You were talking to him about this yesterday, at the convention?*

JACK: Yes.

MARK: *Was it just the two of you alone?*

JACK: It was me, him, and **Jim Shooter.** I told him that he should be more like Larry and just relax and have a great time.

MARK: *What did he say?*

JACK: He agreed! We got along amicably.

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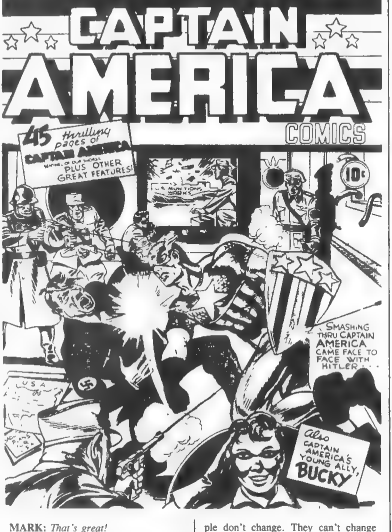
"Marvel's screwing themselves. . .There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MARK: *That's great!*

JACK: Yeah! The only thing is — I'm trying to get my pages back and I can't understand why there's such a struggle. Or why there's a struggle over who did what or who created what. There's no reason for that, 'cause Stan and I *know*. Nobody else knows. And if — if Stan would only come out of that hiding place and just tell it to the world, see — everything would go great.

MARK: *Jack, even though each of you, in your own hearts, know who did what —*

JACK: We know!

MARK: *—do you think that time has obscured some of —*

JACK: NO! It hasn't obscured it. He knows it, I know it. How we're gonna prove it, I don't know.

MARK: *Do you think there'll be a resolution to all this soon?*

JACK: I don't think so. I think that people don't change. They can't change Sometimes, it's too late. And you'll just go on being what you are, and I'll go on being what I am because I'm just like that. It'll be something that, maybe lawyers will resolve for us. Human beings remain human beings. I can predict anything that Stan will do, and, uh —

MARK: *He can predict what you'll do?*

JACK: Possibly, he can. He knows I'm a right guy, and I'm not gonna hurt him in any way, and vice versa.

MARK: *Apart from the working relationship, do you miss the friendship you guys had?*

JACK: No, because I make a lot of new friendships all the time. I know I can't change Stan. I say my piece, he says his piece, and I let it go at that.

MARK: *You know, the whole world would probably like to see the two of you guys shake hands.*

JACK: We did, yesterday! But it resolves nothing. I could shake hands with Stan 'till doomsday and it would mean nothing, see. It would mean nothing — it would mean that the dance went on, that's all. But beyond that the situation's still the same. Somebody else will have to arbitrate. I'll leave it to wiser heads. I don't say I have the wisest head in the world I'll leave it to people with patience. I'll try to have patience myself in the hopes that something positive will come out of all this Whatever I want out of this is half-gone already, and whatever's left I'm willing to be conciliatory about.

MARK: *What's a positive thing that could come out of all of it?*

JACK: A change in Marvel. A change for the younger people. I think they're not giving the younger people time to grow, to develop as editors, writers, artists. One guy told me, "I got the CAPTAIN AMERICA book — and you watch what I do with it!" Three weeks later he's working on another book. So how much time has he got to develop his Captain America style?

MARK: *What could Marvel do to change that?*

JACK: Help the guy, like we did in the old days. There doesn't have to be that much pressure on people. Marvel itself isn't getting its full share of what it should get. They're cheating themselves. If they did get their full share, if they allowed growth — loyalty alone won't get them sales. They're screwing themselves. I don't say that in a demeaning manner, I say that strictly as a business failure.

MARK: *Of course, they're also making money.*

JACK: On toys and movies. On magazine sales they made more in the old days. CAPTAIN AMERICA used to sell 900,000 a month. The other books were selling over 5 - 600,000 a month GREEN LANTERN was doing that. Why were comic books so exciting? Cause guys were giving their full share.

MARK: *And you could feel it in the product?*

JACK: Oh, yes! When Captain America was in a fight it was me doing a ballet. Fantasizing myself beating five or six guys, when in real life, of course, I'd get smeared!

MARK: *(Laughter.)*

JACK: But in this fantasy life which I dramatized, I would sock one guy while the other guy slid under the table and the third guy fell against the stove And then they would come back and there'd be follow-up movement — and that was ex-

doesn't have to be that much pressure."

citing. The reader caught that. Now they've made comics a serious thing instead of play.

MARK: *Do you read any of the current comics?*

JACK: Occasionally, when I'm not busy.

MARK: *Did you see DARK KNIGHT?*

JACK: Yes. **Frank Miller**'s a fine artist and he's doing a fine job. He's gonna experiment, he's gonna dare, he's a guy with a lot of guts, and he's gonna risk it in a positive way because he's got the talent to do it. Something good is gonna come out of whatever he does. I would never worry about Frank if I was an editor. Whatever he gave me I would publish immediately. I'm a big fan of his. He's one of the few lucky ones who's getting a chance to grow. **John Byrne** is getting a chance to grow.

MARK: *On SUPERMAN?*

JACK: Of course. He's a lucky guy. It took **Leonardo da Vinci** twelve years before he became a Master and made the "Mona Lisa." Twelve years!

MARK: *So the companies aren't giving their young talent enough time to flourish?*

JACK: That's right. In ten years we got the Sistine Chapel, see. Give me ten years, you know what the heck would come out of me?

MARK: *What?*

JACK: I don't know. You'd get a whole post office wall, murals and everything.

MARK: *You can come do that at my house.*

JACK: I had a proposal like that yesterday. *(Laughter.)* Somebody wanted me to do a naked Doctor Strange.

MARK: *A naked Doctor Strange!*

JACK: Well, I suggested it, because I felt it would be in keeping with what was done in the Vatican.

MARK: *You suggested the naked Doctor Strange —?*

JACK: Yeah, because it would be difficult, like the Sistine Chapel. Somebody from another dimension reaching out to Doctor Strange —

MARK: *To touch his hand.*

JACK: Of course, I would do it in the Classical mode, which is nudity. The kind of Doctor Strange nobody's ever seen.

MARK: *Wow.*

JACK: I would call it "Strange Strange."

MARK: *(Laughter.)*

JACK: Of course, I'm joshing — that's my way of having fun.

MARK: *You want to go out fighting when you go, Jack?*

JACK: Yes, I will. I'll probably get blown up by a machine I'll fool around with. I was a lousy mechanic, okay?

MARK: *You don't want to die in your sleep?*

JACK: I never will. I know it.

MARK: *You're too much of a go-getter?*

JACK: Nah, I'm a figure-outer. In fact, I'm figuring out how not to die. I just figured a way where I could live 200 years, and come back.

MARK: *Tell me*

JACK: No, I'm not gonna tell you! It's my own thing. I'll tell your great-grandson!

MARK: *So in the year 2125 we might see a whole different version of the NEW GODS?*

JACK: Yes, 'cause I'll be back and nobody'll know how I did it.

MARK: *Cause you'll use a different name.*

JACK: No — I'll use **Kirby**. I'll always use **Kirby**, I like it. I'll come back and tell your great-grandson what a great guy you were for paying some attention to me.

The Demon Queen was not evil . . . . Just totally vain. TOTALLY vain, and able to alter people's emotions at will. Or whim. Remember that. Keep it constantly in mind. It explains a great deal about her. She got bored easily. And she had been shut away in Limbo for several thousand years. It's not really astounding that when she did get out she went on something of a spree. Quite without malice, of course. If someone had pointed out to her that her behaviour was perhaps a little antisocial, she would have given the notion at least, oh, a millisecond's thought before she zapped them to oblivion. Antisocial implies a society; she had no peers. Immoral implies a social structure, an ethical bond, a respect for and recognition of others if not as equals at least as sentient beings. The Demon Queen lacked any sense of any of these things. Not evil. Far too dangerous to be let out on her own, but not evil. TERRIBLY misunderstood . . .

REDFOX

THE DEMON QUEEN SAGA

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"I'm approaching my 500th 3-D."

Todd Reiss & friend, showing off his 3-D PLAYBOY collage, which was displayed in the L.A. & Chicago Playboy Clubs.

TODD REIS

Todd Reis has received critical acclaim for his 3-D Shadowboxes from both fans and comic-art professionals alike. He is a conscientious and diligent craftsman with an eye for detail and the steady hands of a surgeon. Each 3-D is an exploration of relative space and study in perspective that is, in short, inviting.

I've known Todd personally for several years. He is and always will be a comic-art fan at heart. One need look no further than a well-drawn comic cover to see where Todd gets his inspiration.

But where a majority of readers are, at best, indifferent to the media, Todd is an active participant, a collaborator. Each shadowbox is a labor of love.

MIKE REIDY: *Todd, looking at your three-dimensional work here, it's evident that it requires an inordinate amount of patience, a great deal of skill, and a lot of craft. Why do you do your 3-D Shadowboxes?*

TODD REIS: I do them because it's something I really enjoy doing. I get a certain satisfaction out of the final product. It's like working on a jigsaw puzzle. When I start with a flat print, poster, or photo and add my sculpting talents to give it depth and dimension, I really enjoy seeing what I have added to the original piece of art. I feel like I have participated with the artist in creating the picture.

MIKE: *For the benefit of the readers, what is the three-dimensional aspect of your work?*

TODD: I start with several printed copies of an interesting piece of art. It may be of a photo or drawing and may be anywhere from 5" x 6" to 24"x 35". I cut out various layers and overlap them while separating the layers with balsa wood. When put together, the layers give a very 3-dimensional effect which makes you feel like you can actually reach into the picture.

MIKE: *It's a collaboration in depth perception between you and the artist?*

TODD: Exactly.

MIKE: *How long have you been doing your 3-Ds?*

TODD: I've been doing them for over ten years, since the early Seventies. I was inspired by my love of the comic-art form, having been a long-time collector, and by a simple 3-dimensional *decoupage* picture of a flower I saw in an arts-and-crafts store. It had only three layers that were separated with balls of silicon, but it was a very

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"I cut up...HOWARD THE DUCK #1."

dimensional effect. I found out later this craft was referred to as Paper Tolling. It seemed simple to do, and I thought it would be interesting to apply the technique to comic-book covers. I couldn't draw, yet I wanted to do something "comic" oriented. I initially tried doing a FLASH cover. It was only about four layers deep, but I was still impressed with the finished effect. By my current standards, however, it was done very primitively.

MIKE: *Did you experiment a lot in the beginning with materials and techniques?*

TODD: Well, I didn't have the patience I have now, so I cut a lot of corners back then. I concentrated more on the ends rather than the means. On the other hand, I was teaching myself as I went along; no one was instructing me. As a result of various experiments with materials, frames, and lots of practice, each 3-D got better and better.

MIKE: *I'd like to read a quote from John Byrne that is a ringing endorsement of your work. "What most of us are doing in comics is trying to overcome a single insurmountable obstacle: the third dimension. Many have found ways of creating fabulous illusions of speed and scope, but few, if any, have ever given a true illusion of depth. Todd has simply skipped that step altogether. There is no illusion here. This is reality. You don't simply get the FEELING of being able to reach into the picture, of being able to see AROUND the characters; you CAN. And all this without violating the inherent form of the original work. I love 'em!" Is that the kind of effect that the professionals seem to get from your work?*

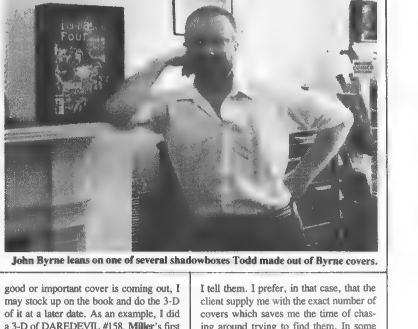
TODD: I've never had a negative reaction to what I do. People are either amazed by it or indifferent to it. I've done about nine 3-D Shadowboxes from various covers John has drawn which, I'm proud to say, are hanging in his studio.

MIKE: *At what point did you go public with your work?*

TODD: After I had been doing them for about 6 months, I showed my work to **Earle Bowman,** the owner of Passport Books in North Hollywood, California. He agreed to put a few 3-Ds on display and to see what reactions they generated. Shortly thereafter, he sold a 3-D which was of HOWARD THE DUCK #1. Of course, at that time it was an extremely popular book. Some people cringed to think that I cut up several issues for the 3-D.

MIKE: *There are probably a lot of things that you've cut up that are worth a small fortune these days.*

TODD: Yes, but most of the 3-Ds I do of comic-book covers are of fairly new issues bought at cover price or so. If I know a good or important cover is coming out, I may stock up on the book and do the 3-D of it at a later date. As an example, I did a 3-D of DAREDEVIL #158, **Miller**'s first issue, soon after it came out, because I simply liked the cover. Now that book is quite valuable. There are a few people that have me do 3-Ds of back-issue covers. The collectors or dealers are usually very curious as to why I need so many copies of the same issue and usually wince when I tell them. I prefer, in that case, that the client supply me with the exact number of covers which saves me the time of chasing around trying to find them. In some cases where the cost is too high, I try to use color Xerox copies instead.



John Byrne leans on one of several shadowboxes Todd made out of Byrne covers.

MIKE: *Was that an old issue of TALES OF SUSPENSE I saw on your workbench recently?*

TODD: Yes, that was issue #95 I was doing a 3-D of. It was part of an order for my biggest fan, **Dr. Ron Silverstein**. Over the past 5 years or so he's commissioned me to do over 60 shadowboxes for his private collection. He always supplies me with whatever number of copies I need.

MIKE: *What was the most valuable comic you've ever cut up for a 3-D?*

TODD: That was an old CAPTAIN AMERICA from around 1946. I forget which issue, but I know it ran about $35 a copy. Personally, I would have preferred to use color Xerox copies, but the client insisted on actual covers and was willing to pay for them.

MIKE: *Back to the original question, where else did you display your work?*

TODD: Well, I've also had displays at Continental Comics in Northridge, California, Andromeda Books in Santa Barbara, The Funny Papers in Chicago, and several locations in the Phoenix area. I put them into an arts-and-crafts store in Hollywood once, but that ended up being too costly. I go to the San Diego Con every year, and

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Todd R. Reis (pronounced Rice)
Occupation: Computer Systems Analyst/Programmer
Born: Milwaukee, WI
Residences: Los Angeles, CA; Phoenix, AZ; Denver, CO
Artistic Sideline: 3-Dimensional Shadowbox artist and original art collector
Artistic Training: Self-taught
Favorite Comics: Too many to mention
Notable Item: My name came to Roy Thomas' mind when he created Obsidian's alter ego (Todd Rice) for INFINITY, INC.

"I did a 3-D of Terri Wells, the

in 1978, I also displayed my work at the Chicago Con.

MIKE: *Since a majority of your work is commissioned by professionals, would you consider yourself more of a Pro-favorite as opposed to a Fan-favorite?*

TODD: That's interesting, and I would like to think so. I know some of them must think I'm a bit crazy in doing what I do.

MIKE: *I like the way Bernie Wrightson responded to your work.*

TODD: I did a 3-D for him of the wrap-around cover to the first SWAMP THING SAGA reprint DC did in 1977. It was a picture of a battling Swamp Thing in a wooded swamp accompanied by numerous inhuman creatures. Very detailed! I understand that he was so impressed, he took a flashlight to it and studied all the various layers. In exchange for the 3-D, Bernie was to do his version of the Batman for my collection. He felt it only fair to put as much effort into his piece as I had put into mine. What I got back was an original **Wrightson** Batman in a "thinking" position set within a cave-like environment with a smoldering volcano in the background.

MIKE: *We're talking about a painting done in various mediums. I think you must have felt very complimented. I don't want to use the word "flattered", but...*

Todd, describe the tools and materials you use to put together a 3-D.

TODD: To start with, I need several copies of an interesting print or comic-book cover to work on as a basis for the 3-D.

MIKE: *About how many copies?*

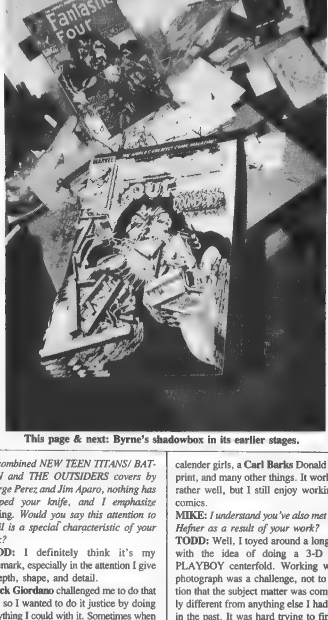
TODD: Twelve to twenty, but that depends on the detail and depth incorporated in the drawing. I also use black posterboard, various sized sticks of balsa wood, black felt markers, a #11 exacto knife, white glue, and wood materials for the frame when the 3-D is finished.

I start by mounting one copy of the print on a piece of black posterboard. After studying the picture to determine the major layers, I take another copy of the print and cut out the furthest background. I color the balsa wood black, cut off various sized pieces, and glue them on top of the first mounted print over the areas I wish to bring out. This goes on layer by layer, bit by bit adding dimension to the details.

MIKE: *When you say you cut out layers, you're actually talking about things like buildings, trees, smoke, all the characters, and details on the characters like fingers and hair; it could be just about anything?*

TODD: Right. Although the first layer may be fairly full and relatively flat, as I bring the picture further out, I deal more specifically with individual details.

MIKE: *Looking at the 3-D you did for DC, the combined NEW TEEN TITANS/ BATMAN and THE OUTSIDERS covers by George Perez and Jim Aparo, nothing has escaped your knife, and I emphasize* nothing. *Would you say this attention to detail is a special characteristic of your work?*



This page & next: Byrne's shadowbox in its earlier stages.

TODD: I definitely think it's my trademark, especially in the attention I give to depth, shape, and detail.

Dick Giordano challenged me to do that 3-D, so I wanted to do it justice by doing everything I could with it. Sometimes when I get that crazy with detail, things get a little lost in the background, so I find it better if I restrain myself from going too far.

MIKE: *Let's move away from your comic cover work. You've done 3-Ds of magazine covers, movie posters, small greeting card prints,...*

TODD: Yes, after I got going, I wanted to apply my skill in other areas. I did a couple of STAR WARS posters, some Boris posters, several old time Olympia Beer calender girls, a **Carl Barks** Donald Duck print, and many other things. It works out rather well, but I still enjoy working on comics.

MIKE: *I understand you've also met Hugh Hefner as a result of your work?*

TODD: Well, I toyed around a long time with the idea of doing a 3-D of a PLAYBOY centerfold. Working with a photograph was a challenge, not to mention that the subject matter was completely different from anything else I had done in the past. It was hard trying to find the right one, but eventually, I did a 3-D of **Terri Wells**, the December 1980 Playmate. I liked the way it turned out, so I presented it as a gift to **Hugh Hefner**. He had seen 3-D work like it before, but never so well executed. Later on, I did a 3-D of a PLAYBOY cover and did a large 3-dimensional collage depicting the history of PLAYBOY. That eventually was put on display at the LA and Phoenix PLAYBOY Clubs.

December 1980 PLAYBOY Playmate."

MIKE: *You know it's interesting that you mentioned the word "collage" because this involves a bit more than faithfully copying a cover. You actually arranged the various pieces on various levels...*

TODD: Right. It took a lot more originality on my part. I had done two other collages previously: a Flash collage featuring his Rogue's Gallery and one based on various characters drawn by **Jim Aparo**. The PLAYBOY collage was very complex and took about four months to complete. It took a lot of research finding the essential photos that I thought would work with the right poses. I made a large number of little 3-Ds from the photos and had to rearrange the layout of them several times. I'm very pleased with the way it turned out.

MIKE: *I think you've succeeded very well. There are some pictures that go way back including the famous one of Marilyn Monroe. Definitely a part of PLAYBOY history. In addition to just layering your work, do you actually sculpt the balsa and curve the paper to give shape and form?*

TODD: Right again. It isn't just flatly brought out layer by layer. I try to give actual shape to what is drawn or photographed. As with the PLAYBOY collage, there are plenty of curves to deal with.

MIKE: *You've also done some 3-Ds for various comics writers, haven't you?*

TODD: Yes, I've done several for **Roy Thomas** and **Gerry Conway**. I've also done some for **David Anthony Kraft, Steve Englehart, Mike Friedrich, Cary Bates, Paul Kupperberg, Jack C. Harris, Don Glut, Denny O'Neil,** and **Harlan Ellison. Jenette Kahn** had me do a 3-D of the SUPERMAN/MUHAMMED ALI cover for DC a few years back. Singer **Jack Jones** of LOVE BOAT fame was also interested in my work.

By the way, when **Roy Thomas** created Obsidian for INFINITY, INC., he made the character's alter ego "Todd Rice" from Milwaukee, WI. Although I had known Roy for several years, he was not aware that I, also, was born and raised there. It was a bit ironic.

MIKE: *One of the most fascinating aspects of your craft is the art collection you've acquired as a result of your trades with professionals. Right off the "bat," however, let me ask you this. Almost everything you have hanging on your wall is of the Batman. Why?*

TODD: Well, although I think the character is one of the most interesting, I'm not fanatical about him like some fans who have their favorites. Personally, I have a wide range of favorites. When I started to collect original art, I wanted to build a collection based on one subject matter and see how each artist would interpret that subject. Since the Batman is such a versatile figure and so many artists want to try their hand at the character, I chose him as the main subject. Once I have acquired a Batman piece from an artist, I'm still interested in doing more trading for any other piece that they might be interested in doing or for some of their original cover art. As an example, **Mike Grell** did a beautiful rendition of the Warlord for me, and I would like him to do a Jon Sable piece next. **John Byrne**, on the other hand, usually trades me his original covers.

MIKE: *Let's go through a few of these original pieces.*

You have an inked Batman and Robin piece by Nestor Redondo, a wash piece of Batman and the Huntress by Joe Staton, a nice color Batman piece by Carl Potts, a humorous color Batduck piece by Scott Shaw!, and a moody airbrush Batman piece by William Stout.

Now, with the exception of Joe Staton, these are artists not normally associated with drawing the character.

TODD: Yes, that's what makes the collection interesting. By the way, the **Stout** piece was one of the first pieces I had commissioned to do in trade.

MIKE: *Here's a nice color airbrush work by Canadian artist, Ken Steacy.*

TODD: That's a moody illustration of the Batman atop a flagpole. It's similar to the portfolio work he did for MARVEL FANFARE. We're doing another trade right now. I'm doing a 3-D of his second MARVEL FANFARE IRON MAN cover for his version of the Joker.

MIKE: *Here's a nice color piece of the Batman crouched atop a chimney, by Brent Anderson on green paper in dry media, poster size.*

You also have some inked pieces here by the Batman's creator, Bob Kane, Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez, Rick Hoberg, Marshall Rogers, Jan Duursema, and Jim Aparo. You've known Jim for a long time, haven't you?

"I crave a certain amount of recognition."

© DC Comics Inc

TODD: Since about 1977. Incidentally, while doing a Batman/Hawkman team-up in BRAVE AND BOLD #139, he drew a panel with Hawkman flying past a billboard which said "3-Ds by **Todd Reis**." I got a real kick out of that.

MIKE: *You have several more here. You know, the suspense of waiting for a drawing and not knowing what to expect must be pretty exciting.*

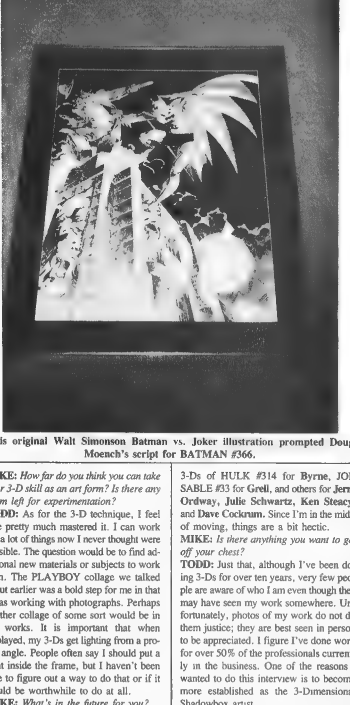
TODD: To a degree. In most cases, the wait is only a few months. There have been some cases where I have had to wait years for the piece of art. However, it's usually worth it. In **Dick Giordano's** case, he was working on a piece in his spare time over a long period. I was very anxious to receive it, but he wanted to take even more time in order to color it, since he normally doesn't get a chance to do that. In the end, the long wait was well worth it.

MIKE: *Now here are some nice pencil pieces by Curt Swan, Mike Nasser, Michael Kaluta, and Jack Kirby.*

TODD: I showed the **Swan** piece to **Joe Rubinstein** and he dearly wanted to ink it. However, after much deliberation, and as much as I respect Joe's talent, I decided to leave the drawing intact, as is.

MIKE: *This painting Don Newton did of the Batman and a Joker face is beautiful. Not to slight anyone else, but this Walter Simonson Batman illustration is one of the finest pieces of craftsmanship I've ever seen anywhere.*

TODD: That one has an interesting story behind it. Walt and I worked out a trade which involved my doing a 3-D of his X-MEN/NEW TEEN TITANS wraparound cover in exchange for his rendition of the Batman. It was his idea to include a menacing, evil Joker fighting the Batman atop a tower. Before he sent it to me, he showed it to **Len Wein**, the Batman editor at DC. Len was so blown away by it, that he insisted on using it for a cover. Walt checked with me to see if I'd mind, and Len had **Doug Moench** write a story around it. It became the cover to BATMAN #366. By the way, there was no room at the top of the picture to put the Batman logo, so they had it scrawled over the tower. That, however, is not on the large poster-size original I have.



This original Walt Simonson Batman vs. Joker illustration prompted Doug Moench's script for BATMAN #366.

MIKE: *Have you ever considered putting any of your original art collection on display?*

TODD: I had a few on loan to the owners of bookstores, but to tell the truth, a lot of my collection is still unframed. I've been collecting more than I've had time or money to frame, and my wall space is somewhat limited.

MIKE: *How far do you think you can take your 3-D skill as an art form? Is there any room left for experimentation?*

TODD: As for the 3-D technique, I feel I've pretty much mastered it. I can work out a lot of things now I never thought were possible. The question would be to find additional new materials or subjects to work with. The PLAYBOY collage we talked about earlier was a bold step for me in that I was working with photographs. Perhaps another collage of some sort would be in the works. It is important that when displayed, my 3-Ds get lighting from a proper angle. People often say I should put a light inside the frame, but I haven't been able to figure out a way to do that or if it would be worthwhile to do at all.

MIKE: *What's in the future for you?*

TODD: I'm approaching my 500th 3-D and I'd like to do something special for that; I'm not sure what yet. I just finished doing ten more for **Dr. Silverstein**. Next are 3-Ds of HULK #314 for **Byrne**, JON SABLE #33 for **Grell**, and others for **Jerry Ordway**, **Julie Schwartz**, **Ken Steacy**, and **Dave Cockrum**. Since I'm in the midst of moving, things are a bit hectic.

MIKE: *Is there anything you want to get off your chest?*

TODD: Just that, although I've been doing 3-Ds for over ten years, very few people are aware of who I am even though they may have seen my work somewhere. Unfortunately, photos of my work do not do them justice; they are best seen in person to be appreciated. I figure I've done work for over 50% of the professionals currently in the business. One of the reasons I wanted to do this interview is to become more established as the 3-Dimensional Shadowbox artist.

In the near future, I hope to be in a more mobile position and show my work at more conventions around the country. I guess I crave a certain amount of recognition.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

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INTELLIGENCE APPARENT

Dear Mr. Kraft:

Could you please send me a copy of COMICS INTERVIEW #4, the one with the **Roy G. Krenkel** interview. I am enclosing $5 to cover the extra cost of postage abroad. I've just found out about that man through an article in QUA BROT issue #1, and I find his work stunning — I'm only sorry I've just found out about his work now. It's hard to understand why I've never seen any before, it's so good I'm sure I would have noticed — the craft and intelligence apparent in a drawing like "The Hunt" just leap off the page. For the past week, every time I've passed the magazine I've had to pick it up and drool, and anyone visiting me has been forced to admire it; I've made a giant-size copy to show everyone the flowing carry on movement, the rhythms and symmetrys, the balancing blacks, it's just so beautifully perfect within itself. To have missed the man all this time is just so disappointing.

Thanks also for your own magazine — I really enjoyed the special Batman issue; even though it's not my cup of tea, the differing perspectives of the creators back-to-back like that was very interesting, and the **Burt Ward** interview was a great touch to end on. I'm looking forward to next issue's Swamp Thing interview; I'm sure it'll be a good one. Could I also request if possible talks with **Nick Cardy** or **Jeff Jones** sometime in the future? I'm happy with the way things are now, the blending of old and new is most satisfying. Thanks again for the **Krenkel** issue

Ian Cairns
74 Grosvenor Road
Jesmond,
Newcastle upon Tyne 2,
England N E 2 2 R Q

GI JOE: "SPIRITUALLY UPLIFTING"

Dear DAK,

Haven't read MICRA yet but I have read COMICS INTERVIEW #37 and really enjoyed it. I liked everything in it — especially the **Steve Gerber** interview. At first, I thought: "Yeah, just what CI needs: more of **Steve Gerber**." But I thought it was the highlight of the issue. The more I get to know "the **Gerber** baby" (as I guess **John Byrne** calls him), the more I like him, even though I've never met him and we only conversed for about a minute on the phone, once, when I was editing CI. The **Buzz Dixon** interview fulfilled what you've said is one of your major intentions for CI: to have interviews that even people who know nothing about the interviewee or the subject discussed would find entertaining and interesting. Never having heard of **Buzz Dixon**, I started reading the interview mainly because his "Rambo"-style picture grabbed my attention and his Vital Stats indicated we had, at least, similar tastes in movies; I found myself getting more and more interested the further the interview progressed. The **Larry Hama** interview was enjoyable, too; I agree with both Larry and Steve (I'll call them by their first names, just as if I know them personally) that GI JOE has generally had more interesting, varied and well-characterized heroes and villains than most comics; perhaps lacking the appealingly high T. and A. quotient of LOVE AND ROCKETS, but certainly more spiritually uplifting.

The old "Karma Chameleon."

Bill Chadwick
1160 Briarcliff Court NE
Apartment C
Atlanta GA 30306

SOUL CAN'T BE STAMPED WITH A COPYRIGHT SYMBOL

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW,

Poor **Steve Gerber**. To fight so hard for the right to be associated with his creation, only to have the movie bomb and be blue penciled off the book.

Kind of sad. Once upon a time, HOWARD *was* a decent book. STAR WARS and Kung Fu parodies aside, the feature was nearly always entertaining. It had a heart. It was good for a laugh.

Things changed. After Steve's departure, we were left with variations on puns involving the works "duck!" and "quack" and little else. Marvel retained the rights to the name and the likeness but the soul of the character couldn't be stamped with copyright symbols.

I only saw half the movie, leaving midway during a car chase scene when I realized things *wouldn't* be better. Only one thing amused me about the picture: that Hollywood, with all their millions, couldn't provide a fraction of what Steve and Gene gave us, all in the much maligned format of the comic book.

Hopefully, we will see new characters from Steve. True originals in the comics biz are rare. It'd be a shame to lose another.

Joe Frank
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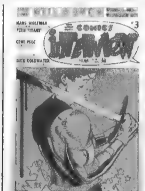

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MARVEL UNIVERSE AS WE KNOW IT ABOUT TO DIE

Dear DAK:

I must say that I am shocked to see the total lack of concern exhibited by your readers over the slow destruction of the Marvel Universe. Marvel Comics, as it stands, is in some deep crap. Now I read about !@#$*& **Jim Shooter** trying to bring a "human element" into the Marvel Universe? Human element, hah!

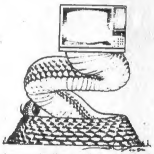
I remember reading comics when they were fun. Just plain fun to read, with no heavy moral implications. YOU DON'T NEED a human element in comics! For God's sake, this is superheroes and villains and people that want to rule the world and invading aliens!

I used to regularly collect at least seven Marvel titles, along with various issues that would come out from month to month. I now collect no Marvel titles whatsoever. If I ever became Marvel editor-in-chief, I would institute a standing order that NO superheroes be killed unless it is for a very legitimate reason. A legitimate death: Phoenix, since she had psychological problems from day one. Now, there was absolutely NO reason for the deaths of heroes like Guardian and Iron Fist. It was a cheap way to get people to buy the book and get in some controversy to boost sales. Killing innocent bystanders in comics is bad enough, but at least they're just average Joes with no super powers. When the good guys come in and they can't handle it, then comics aren't fun anymore. They are depressing!

Jim Shooter needs to open up his eyes. It seems that the Marvel Universe, as we know it, is about to die, and he is just contributing to its demise. DAK, I ask you a favor. Print this letter in your column and hopefully it will reach some others out there who feel the same way. Then, maybe, comics can be enjoyable once more.

Adam Baker
9016 O'Neal Road
Raleigh, NC 27612

SIMONSON & McGREGOR



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NEXT ISSUE: A frank interview with FRAZETTA! The legendary comics artist and peerless painter pulls no punches in hard-hitting, marathon talk — on talent, on CONAN, on having a rep — it's all here (with loads of early art!) in COMICS INTERVIEW #42!

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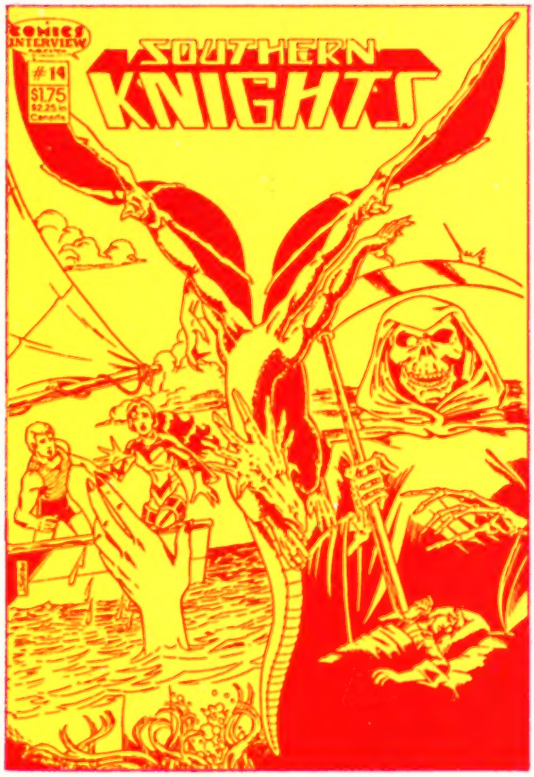

#19

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